

**Sightings of Risso's dolphins (*Grampus griseus*) off Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia.**—On 27 March 1978 a group of 14 Risso's dolphins (*Grampus griseus*) were seen swimming close to shore off the northwestern tip of the Queen Charlotte Islands (133° 01' W, 54° 11' N). Sightings of this species in British Columbia coast waters have been infrequent, with three records, each of single individuals shot or stranded (Guiguet and Pike 1965, Leatherwood et al. 1978).

The dolphins were first observed from shore at 15:00 in Parry Passage, a channel 2 km in width separating Graham Island from Langara Island. They moved to within 200 m of shore in water 10 to 15 m in depth and remained in the same vicinity for 3 hours. Throughout this time, the dolphins swam slowly in a compact although fluid group, moving under and around each other. Close examination with a 20 to

45 power spotting scope indicated extensive interaction between individuals including head nudging and body contact.

There was obvious variation in size; 2 of the 14 dolphins were estimated to be 4 to 4.5 m in length, while the remaining individuals were approximately one-third smaller.

Published descriptions of this species show it to be highly variable in body color and fin markings (Scammon 1874). The slate-gray appearance of the juveniles becomes progressively lighter with age, occasionally to white in older individuals (Leatherwood et al. 1972). All of the dolphins observed near the Queen Charlotte Islands were dark gray on their dorsal body surface, some with pronounced scars; this color merged to cream-white in the head region, with a distinct yellow hue evident in some individuals. These characters distinguished the dolphins from similar species, such as *Globicephala melaena* and *Pseudorca crassidens*.

Of particular interest for future identification of one of the large dolphins was the asymmetric marking on its dorsal fin. The left side possessed a conspicuous white triangular patch intersected by a horizontal dark line (figure 1). This marking was not present on the right side of the fin, nor among the other dolphins. Several, however, had single narrow white bands across the base of the dorsal fin. Photographs which show these markings were taken at the time of the sighting and are deposited in the Photoduplicate File at the British Columbia Provincial Museum.

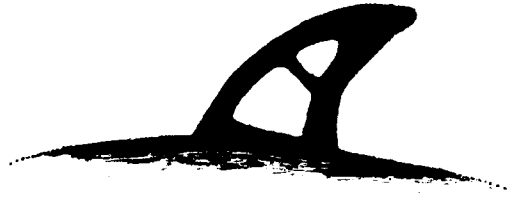


FIGURE 1. Dorsal fin marking on one Risso's dolphin sighted near Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia in March 1978. Drawn from photographs.

After a period of 3 hours in shallow water, the dolphins moved slowly to the center of the channel and then submerged. They were last seen in pairs further out the passage moving at a rapid pace westwards towards open water.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Ian MacAskie and Steve Leatherwood for reviewing the photographs and to J. B. Foster of Ecological Reserves, Government of British Columbia, for funding a research project during which the sighting was made.

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TOM REIMCHEN, *Department of Zoology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2E9. Mailing Address: Box 297, Port Clements, British Columbia, Canada V0T 1R0.* Accepted 19 October 1979.