

## Editorial, News and Views

*The Veterinary Record* of 16 September 1989, continues its reports on the continuing saga of Phocid Seal Disease. Osterhaus and his co-workers showed the presence in sera taken before 1988, of positive neutralization titres to both Rinderpest and Canine Distemper Viruses. However, using the ELISA test, although both viruses gave positive results in some sera, these did not link up with the virus neutralization results. The authors explain this discrepancy by postulating that 'there is a qualitative difference between the types of antibodies produced before and after 1988'. This could have been caused by a mutation which altered the pathogenicity of the virus, or which changed the host-species range of the virus.

In the same Journal, number 26-27, of 23-30 December, the same authors report on the demonstration of three apparently different morbilliviruses in seals—the Phocid Distemper Virus, the Canine Distemper Virus isolated from Lake Baikal Seals, and a virus which infected European Harbour Seals before 1988. They conclude from the data presented that it should be considered as unlikely that an epizootiological link has existed between seals in North Western Europe and those in Lake Baikal.

In the issue for 5 August, the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare report on a count of Common Seals in the area of the Wash. They found 347 animals in July, compared with more than 1000 in 1988. However the average count for the North West quarter has remained fairly steady at 830 over the last six years.

In the 9 September number, Dr John Baker reports the finding of two seal carcasses in poor order with occlusion of the uterine horns. Other seals in the area showed between 34.4 and 101.4 mgms/kg, wet weight, of total PCBs in the blubber. If these two conditions are linked then this is highly indicative of the relationship between pollution with PCBs and fertility in the Grey Seal. In the 11 November number the same author reports on the natural causes of death in non-suckling Grey Seals. He found pneumonias to be the main cause, followed by various parasitic infestations.

*Marine Mammal Science* has published three numbers since I last reported on them. Volume 5, No. 2 includes a tribute to our late colleague, Didier Marchessaux, together with papers on the glucose levels in blood of post weaned Elephant Seals, a census of Bowhead Whales, a comparison of Humpback Whale 'songs' from Alaska with those from Hawaii, the range of California Sea Otters, the calving seasonality of Dall's Porpoise in the North Pacific and the occurrence of Manatees in Mexico. Volume 5, No. 3 reviews chemical restraint and anaesthesia in Pinnipeds, reports on a dwarf form of Spinner dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*) from Thailand, on the haul out patterns of male Hooke's Sea Lions (*Phocarctos hookeri*) in New Zealand and on the movements of Southern Elephant Seals and sub Antarctic fur seals in relation to Marion Island. It also records the first Bottlenose Dolphin to be found in Washington State and the occurrence of two Humpback Wales in the Western Mediterranean Sea. Volume 5, No. 4 reports on nearly 20 years work in determining dental growth layers in known age free ranging bottlenose dolphins, on tracking Harbour Seals by satellite, on an intraperitoneal radio transmitter for sea otters, mating behaviour in Dugongs, adoption behaviour in the Sea Otter, the diet of marine *Sotalia*, diving behaviour of Weddell Seals and the first record of a short finned pilot whale for the South Western Atlantic.

The *Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine*, Volume 20, No. 2 contains an announcement that Dr Michael Stoskopf is coordinating a special Aquatic Animal Medicine Issue. A call for papers was issued by Dr James W. Carpenter, Editor of the *Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine*, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Lavel, Maryland 20708, USA. Volume 20, No. 3, contains reports on two Genera of Nematodes (*Otostrongylus* and *Filaroides*) found in the lungs of Ringed Seals in the Western Arctic, on an epizootic of Seal Pox in Pinnipeds at a Marine Mammal Rehabilitation Centre, and on the diagnosis and treatment of systemic Blastomycosis in a Polar Bear.

The *Journal of Zoology* No. 218, contains an interesting paper on the use of the vibrissae in ringed seals to detect compressional waves, and thus enable blind animals or animals living in very murky water (Such as Lake Saimua) to feed and survive. It lists recordings of underwater vocalizations—mainly below 10 kHz, although sometimes reaching 30 kHz. In No. 219 there is a paper on assessing errors associated with faecal sampling in Harbour Seals, and offering indexes to compensate for these. There is also an initial assessment of population dynamics of the Narwhal and a paper on the growth in Harbour Seals on the Norwegian coast.

*Dolphin Data Base News* advertises six Agencies connected with the organization of what are termed 'Minimally Intrusive Interactions with wild Dolphins'. While under tight control in the open sea, and recognizing that this behaviour is intrusive of itself, such groups of people—of necessity small in number—can appear to do

little harm to the wild stock. However one group offers 'encounters with the native dolphins of South America' where, since pressures on the population are already high, any extra could tip the balance the wrong way—and finally at that. Incidentally, in an article to be published in a future number of *Aquatic Mammals*, Dr Gewalt of Duisburg, reports on the reduction of Cetaceans in that area over the past years.

This newsletter also gives advice on how to pressurize members of the US Senate, unaware of the effects of oil spill disasters on the environment, and pleads with all concerned persons to desist from buying canned tuna fish—especially for their domestic pets.

*Siren*, the latest issue from the United Nations Environmental Programme, refers to yet another incident of poisoning by an algal 'bloom', (this time by *Chrysochromulina polylepis*) affecting the coasts of the Netherlands, Denmark and Southern Norway, in the summer of 1988. It also lists the casualties resulting from the infamous Exxon Valdez oil spill last March in Alaska. More than 20 000 dead birds and 725 dead sea otters were found. How many more died without their bodies being found beggars the imagination and emphasizes the horrific and irreversible nature of these preventable disasters. It also calls for a total ban on the so-called 'Wall of Death Fishing', where each night a total of some 36 000 kilometres of deep nets are drifted through the waters of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. These nets are each between 35–60 kilometres long, and some 10–15 metres deep. Anything caught in these nets dies, regardless of whether it is useful or not, so it forms the most wasteful method of fishing yet employed. Worse still, if these nets become lost, and being non-biodegradable, they will drift for ever with their dead catch increasing as time goes on. New Zealand is so concerned about the practice that their Government is offering the facilities of a naval vessel and aerial surveillance to keep watch on gill net vessels.

The *Cetacean Specialist Group Newsletter* carries a similar message in its October number. Here the Italians are reported as spearheading the pressure for a total ban. In 1988 the Italian Centre for Cetacean Studies (Centro Studi Cetacei) found 92 Whale and Dolphin carcasses entangled in such nets or stranded on the beaches with clear signs of having been entangled, and this only in the waters round the Italian peninsula. The species found included: 9 Sperm Whales, 1 Cuvier's Beaked Whale, 10 Pilot Whales, 5 Risso's Dolphins, 8 Bottlenose Dolphins, 39 Striped Dolphins and 20 unidentified cetaceans. Further information on these findings can be obtained from Dr G. Notarbartolo di Sciara, Centro Studi Cetacei, Museo Civico di Storia Naturale, corso Venezia 55, 20121 Milano, Italy.

A report in the same newsletter commented on the apparently stable population of Susu—the Gangetic River Dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*) in the Chambal River in India—over the last ten years, whereas the construction of the Kaptai dam in Bangladesh has resulted in the extinction of the population of Susu on the Kanaputi River above it.

The US Department of the 'Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service has now placed the Baiji (*Lipotes vexillifer*) on the list of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife. In Peru the 'take' of Dusky Dolphins—*Lagenorhynchus obliquidens*—in drift gill nets has increased markedly over the past 5 years—from 95 in 1985 to 1725 in 1988—and the total dolphin 'take' from 175 to 2290—a very worrying trend. Further details of this can be obtained from Koen van Waerebeck, Laboratorium voor Morfologie en Systematiek der Dieren, Rijksuniversiteit Gent, Ledeganckstraat 35, 9000 Gent, Belgium. Once again the Inter-American Tuna Commission forecasts that the total tuna fishery related dolphin kill will be greater in 1989 than in 1988.

Japanese catches of Dall's Porpoise tripled between 1987 and 1988—a non-sustainable level of takes (from 13 000 to 39 000). The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals—commonly referred to as the Bonn Convention—added seven Cetacean species to Appendix II at the October 1988 Geneva Conference, on the advice of the Scientific Council. These are: *Delphinapterus leucas*, North and Baltic Sea populations of *Delphinus delphis*, *Globicephala melas*, *Grampus griseus*, *Lagenorhynchus acutus* and *albirostris*, *Tursiops truncatus* and *Phocoena phocoena*.

*IAAAM News* reported that the National Aquarium in Baltimore is planning to construct a new Marine Mammal Pavilion covering 80 000 sq ft and including a 1300 seat amphitheatre. The new pool will hold 1.3 million gallons and permit a 27 ft deep view of the animals. It is planned to show 10 Bottlenose Dolphins and 4 Beluga Whales and it is hoped to be open later this year.

Other recent publications received include Robin Baird and Pam Stacey's Annotated List of the Marine Mammals of British Columbia—a total of 33 species so far. The commonest species being Harbour Seals and Killer Whales. The same authors report on interactions between sea birds and marine mammals—including several reports of Killer Whales eating sea birds—and report 28 strandings or incidental catches covering nine species in 1988. These latter were all single strandings—mass strandings being very infrequent on the coasts of British Columbia.

'*Beluga*' the recently published newsletter of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Government of Canada, which was started after the International Forum in Tadoussac to keep all those interested in the well being of the Beluga, brings readers up to date with the current situation.

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