ISSN: 2642-9020

Short Communication

Journal of Marine Science Research and Oceanography

Predation Attempt by a Leopard Seal on two Dwarf Minke Whales

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Submitted: 03 May 2021; **Accepted:** 07 May 2021; **Published:** 12 May 2021

Citation: *Claude R Joiris (2021) Predation Attempt by a Leopard Seal on two Dwarf Minke Whales. J Mari Scie Res Ocean, 4(2): 190-191.*

Introduction

The diet of leopard seal *Hydrurga leptonyx* consists mainly of krill *Euphorbia sp*, penguins, other seals, fish and cephalopods in decreasing order of abundance no cetacean was mentioned [1-6].

Observation and Discussion

During the ANT-XXVI/ 3 expedition of icebreaking *RV Polarstern* in the Amundsen Sea, Antarctica, from January 31, 2010 (Christchurch, New Zealand) to April 3 (off Punta Arenas, Chili) 1,570 half-an-hour transect were devoted to seabird and marine mammal at-sea distribution from the bridge, and 50 hours from helicopter. The counting technique was described and discussed e.g. [7]. Total numbers of marine mammals recorded were 14,500 seals: 2,240 crabeater *Lobodon carciniphagas*, 45 Weddell *Leptonychotes weddellii*, 22 leopard *Hydrurga leptonyx* and 5 Ross *Ommatophoca rossii*, and 200 whales: 130 Antarctic Minke *Balaenoptera bonaerensis*, and at least 3 dwarf Minke *Balaenoptera [acurostrata] sp*, 26 fin Blaenoptera physalus, 15 humpback *Megaptera novaeangliae*, 2 blue *Blaenoptera musculus* and 2 sperm *Physeter macrocephalus.*

On March 22, 2010 at 16:17 2 dwarf Minke whales were noticed in the Amundsen Sea Embayment (70°30'S - 119°W), at a distance of approximatively 2 km of the ship, swimming in open water in an anti-parallel direction (Figure. 1a). The large, finless, back of an unidentified animal appeared, apparently chasing the 1st Minke whale (Figure. 1b). Its face was then seen, and the animal identified as leopard seal (Figure. 1c & d). The whale tried to escape, surface swimming at maximal speed (Figure. 1e).

The whole observation lasted less than 10 minutes, but the end of this apparent predation attempt could not be observed. As far as I am aware, no such predation was mentioned in the literaure. This observation thus fills an important gap concerning the potential prey of leopard seal as well as the predators of dwarf Minke whale.

Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to late coordinator E. Farhrbach and chief scientist K. Gohl, AWI, Bremerhaven, for invitation on board *Polarstern.*

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Figure: 1a to 1e: Successive views of two dwarf Minke whales *Balaenoptera [acurostrata]* sp and a leopard seal *Hydrurga leptonyx*. Amundsen Sea Embayment