

Project Update: October 2020



Stranding of humpback whale on the eastern coast of Ghana Keta fishing ana
It is 23rd October 2020 and residence of the community in south-eastern Ghana (5.9031° N, 0.9868°) have gathered on the coast. With awe and amazement, they watch-on while about 20 young men cautiously try to pull a stranded alive whale towards land with ropes tied around the cetacean. These men have no knowledge of the species they are dealing with. To them, this was just a big fish that washed ashore, and they are willing to kill and survive on it for the next couple of days. What will be left of after feeding will be unburied, allowed to rot on the beach releasing a bad stench in the community. The days after, people will complain of severe headaches and other ailments in the community. With residence having no knowledge of how to treat stranded marine megafaunas this cycle will repeat once every few years. So is the fate of both stranded dead and alive whales and coastal communities in Ghana.



1 - young men trying to capture a stranded humpback whale at Keta fishing community

This was the second such occurrence in the area in a week. This was alarming because in the past, whales stranding was very rare, occurring once in a couple of years. Our checks indicated that the whale seen in the picture is a young humpback whale between 6 months to 2 years. It might have been swimming close to shore with the family to feed and missed the tides. It might have been caught in the low tides, displaced on land unexpectedly. Had this occurred faraway from communities, the tides will return after some time and the young humpback will be washed back into see.

He reported that, they tried to rescue the whale from the young men, but they were outnumbered and misunderstand and were chased out of the area.

Fortunately, for us, this was the first time some fishermen stood against this practice because we have arrived in the community exactly 12 days ago and spoken to the chief fisherman and his team about the significance of protecting cetaceans. This video seen here was captured by one of the fishermen present at our meeting. He reported that, they tried to rescue the whale from the young men, but they were outnumbered and misunderstand and were chased out of the area.

We received two different reports of what happened to the young humpback whale. The initial report stated that these men were able to capture the whale but were unwilling to share their game with other locals and decided to haul it into a track to a place unknown. The second report said, after several hours of unsuccessfully trying to capture the whale, heavy wave arrived, and the injured whale powered back to sea with a few locals' present to witness this. I visited the sight, a day after getting this information but there were no tracks nor carcasses of whale but only several versions of the story. Either ways, the whale was certain of a brutal fate. Either killed by the men or return to see injured, making it vulnerable to attacks.



2 - stranded young humpback whale being pulled to shore by locals

For the first time, some locals resisted the capturing of a stranded whale because of our interactions with them and someone playing a local journalist decided to report this occurrence to us. We are assured by this action that; locals are ready to support the protection of cetaceans and we are motivated to strengthen the network among coastal dwellers and continue the push for legal protection for cetaceans in Ghana.