

FIRST RECORD OF HARBOUR SEAL, *PHOCA VITULINA* L., IN MADEIRA

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With 4 figures

ABSTRACT. In July 1986 a Harbour seal (*Phoca vitulina* Linnaeus, 1758) was found stranded on Praia do Portinho (Madeira). In this note we show some measurements, photos of the animal and some pieces of the skull that were recovered. Previously the mainland of Portugal was the southernmost limit of the range of this species, and the present record is the first for Madeira.

RESUMO. Em Julho de 1986 uma foca comum (*Phoca vitulina* Linnaeus, 1758) foi encontrada em estado de decomposição na Praia do Portinho (Madeira). Nesta nota apresentam-se alguns registos biométricos e imagens do cadáver e de algumas peças ósseas que foram recuperadas. Portugal Continental era considerado o limite a Sul da área de distribuição desta espécie e esta é a sua primeira ocorrência nas águas da Madeira.

It is well known that some pinnipeds may be found far away from their breeding grounds (Bonner and Witthames, 1974).

In the beginning of June 1986 a live seal was sighted near Praia do Portinho — Reis Magos (32°39' N, 16°48' W), in the island of Madeira. This animal showed a cut in the posterior dorsal region of its body (F. Nóbrega, pers. comm.). About one month later this seal was found stranded on the Praia do Portinho, already in an advanced state of decay (see fig. 1.)

Some measurements were made (table I) and some pieces of the skull were collected and deposited in the Museu Municipal do Funchal (MMF 24128). The examination of these bones confirmed the identification of the animal as a Harbour seal, *Phoca vitulina* (see figs. 2 and 3).

It should be noted that the southern limit of dispersion of phocids known is the mainland of Portugal, namely of the species *Erignathus barbatus* (Ray et al., 1982), *Pusa hispida* (Teixeira, 1980; Reiner, 1985), *Cystophora cristata* (Reiner, 1979, 1980; Teixeira, 1980), *Halichoerus grypus* and *Phoca vitulina* (Inácio, 1983; Reiner, 1985) (see fig. 4).

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Fig. 1.—Harbour seal on pebble beach of Reis Magos, Madeira 1986. Top: dorsal view. Bottom: hind flippers of same. Phot. M.R. Nicolau.

The presence of this seal in the waters of Madeira is certainly exceptional.

Harbour seals inhabit temperate, subarctic and some arctic waters of the North Atlantic and North Pacific, giving them one of the largest areas of distribution of any pinniped (Bigg, M. A. 1981). The actual areas

of distribution are the following: northern Portugal (rare) to Barents sea (rare) and Iceland, Gulf of Bothnia, north Baltic sea near the Gulf of Finland (Scheffer, 1958; Hook, 1961; Curry Lindahl, 1975); thought by Ivashin *et al.* (1972) to be abundant on the Faeroe Islands but found to be absent by Bigg (1969 a) and Smith (1965); present in Spitzbergen (Krog and Bjorghov, 1973).

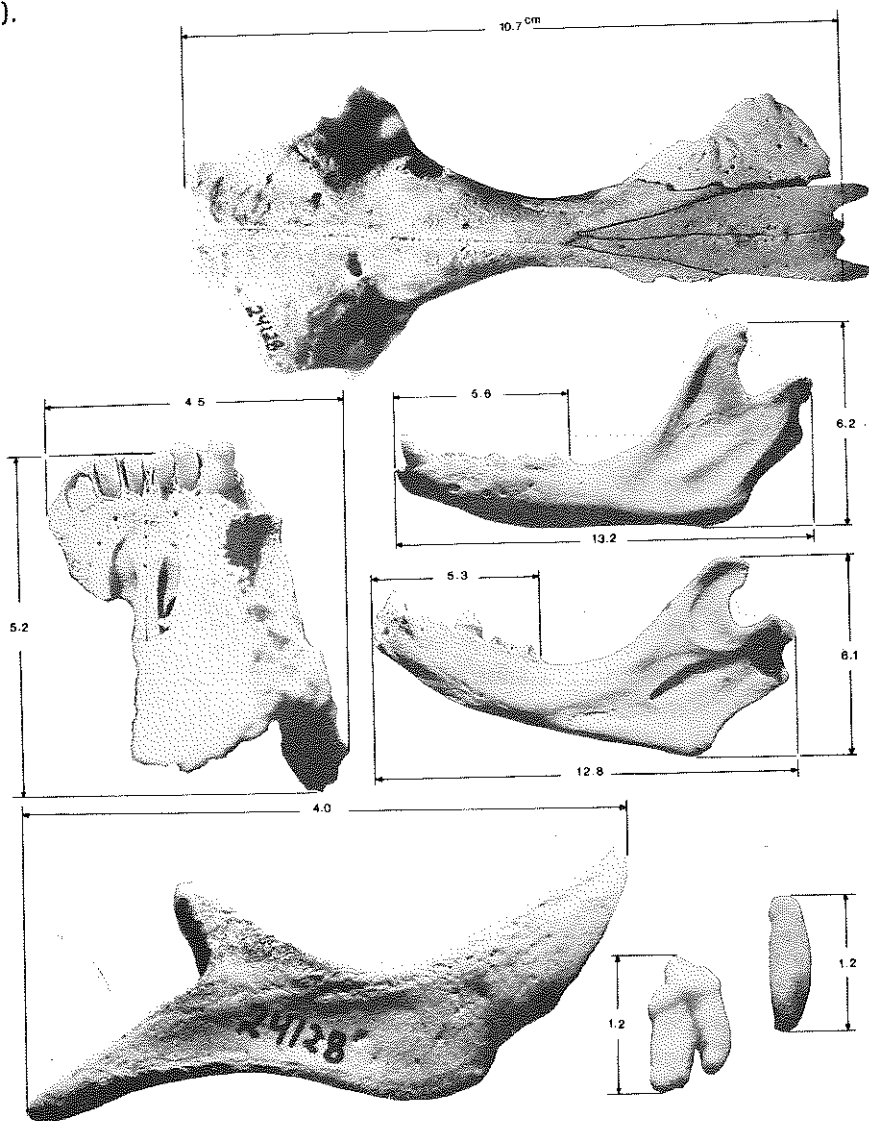


Fig. 2. — Skeletal pieces recovered.

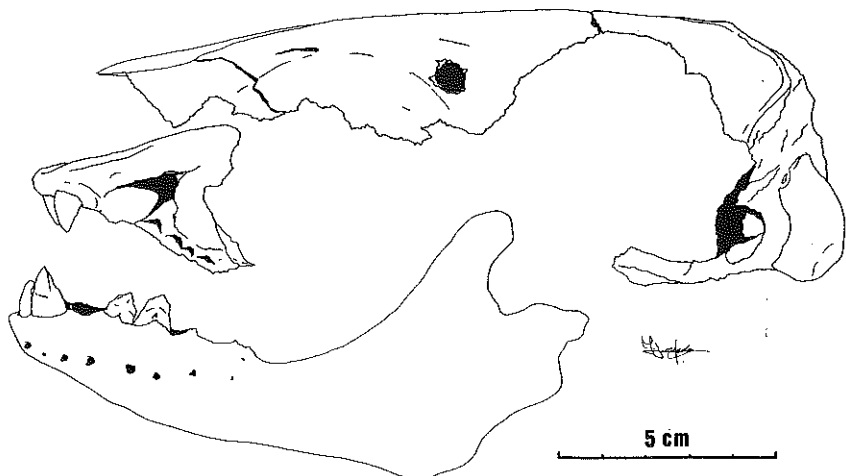


Fig. 3. — Reconstruction of head with recovered bones.

Table I. — External measurements of *Phoca vitulina* in cm.

Total length (from tip of snout to the extremity of posterior limbs.	149
From tip of snout to tip of tail.	134
Length of anterior limb (from anterior insertion to tip).	24
Length of posterior limb.	25.5
Length of tail.	6
From anus to genital aperture.	0.6

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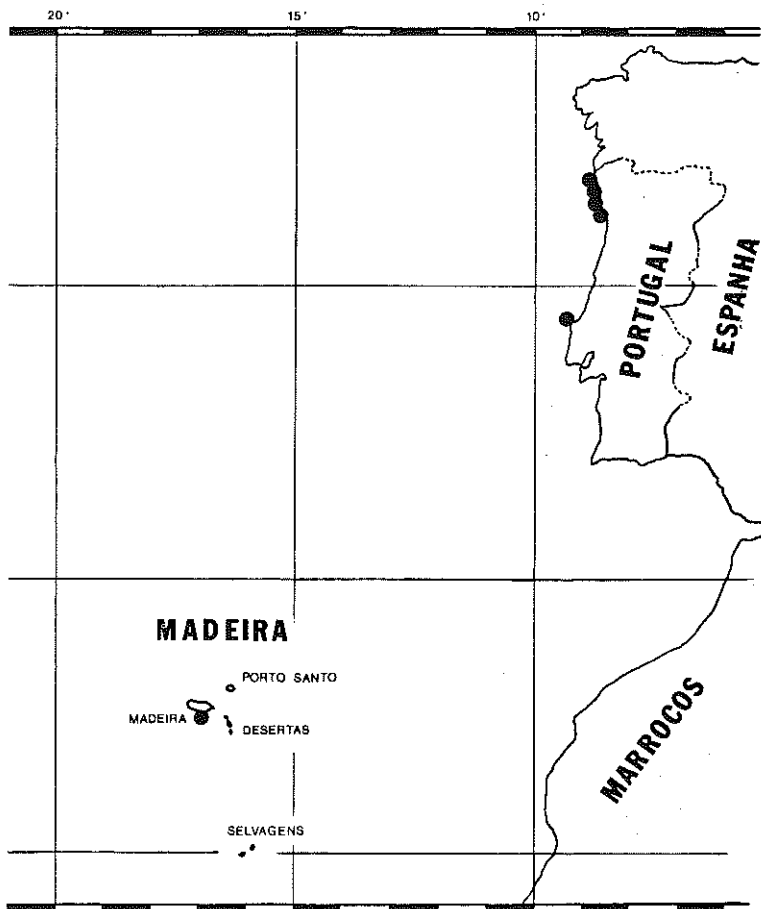


Fig. 4.— Known locations of Harbour seal strandings on the coast of Portugal and Madeira.

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