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INDIAN OCEAN'S HIDDEN GEM

The rich and colourful biodiversity of Sri Lanka

5TH WEST SIDE JAM AND INAUGURAL REEFGATTA

Race report and pictures inside

MOTHER'S DAY AND FATHER'S DAY CELEBRATIONS

Make a date with fun and feasting for the whole family!

Whales Ahoy In the Seas Of Serendib



A love for dolphins and whales as a teen led her to be part of the Indian Ocean Marine Mammal Sanctuary, and a scientist onboard SV *Tulip* from 1982-1985. Over 30 years on, **Abigail Alling** shares with us her experiences and the progress of this programme, and how we can further do our part to save the whales.



Cohabiting: Man And Whale

During these precious days and weeks that stretched into a five-year-long journey, we learnt to follow and sometimes live with sperm whales. Strange-looking marine mammals yet the most lovable of great whales, they dive for extended periods of time and live in social groups comprising mostly females, juveniles and calves.

I had always been enthralled by dolphins while growing up along the seashore in the United States where they are plentiful. It was these creatures that inspired me, at the age of 17, to travel the world and find my way as a sailor exploring the oceans. But imagine my surprise to come face-to-face with sperm whales, which are giant cousins of the small dolphin and have the largest complex brain on the planet. Our years

floating amongst these great beings in a small sailboat were an enchanted time, and the overall experience left me feeling that we were co-creating the newly formed **Indian Ocean Marine Mammal Sanctuary**.

During these early years, we also stumbled upon a resident population of blue whales, which resulted in an emerging photographic catalogue of individuals and the first unique recordings of Sri Lanka blue whale vocalisations. That data, combined with observations made while following sperm whales for days at a time, inspired decades of dedicated research about sperm whale echolocation and social behaviour; blue whale vocalisations and identification; as well as studies about the identification, distribution, abundance and behaviour of cetaceans.

photo by Duncan Murrell



Map 1 - Odontaspes sightings in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden - July 6 to August 17, 2010



Map 2 - Odontaspes sightings in the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal and the Malacca Strait - August 7 to September 29, 2010

The Net Of Death

There was another component to this initial research involving cetacean by-catch due to gillnet fishing that was not glamorous and not easy to resolve. It continues to this day. The seeds of this story were planted when I would sail into fishing ports at the break of dawn, in order to observe the fisheries' catch for the day. It was in these quiet moments that I learnt about an unintended capture – dolphins, dugongs, beaked whales, turtles and sharks – that goes on silently around the world and is slowly decimating populations. The fishermen did not wish for this to happen and are not to blame, but by setting synthetic nets for their night catch, they were inadvertently causing other innocent creatures to drown in a tangle of twine.

Years later in 2010, I conducted a survey for cetaceans while onboard *SV Mir* that started in the Red Sea and continued across the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal, and then to Singapore. During the two-month voyage, we encountered many small cetaceans everywhere except close to the shores of Sri Lanka (see maps of the sightings), possibly due to the synthetic gillnet fishing. We also sailed along the shipping lanes south of Sri Lanka where we observed numerous whales surfacing and diving close to the speeding commercial vessels en route to distant lands. Both of these challenges pose great threat to all cetaceans and need more extensive investigation and proactive response by local and international people.

A Pledge To Save The Whales

All cetaceans worldwide, are at risk from commercial whaling (by Japan, Norway and Iceland), gillnet by-catch, habitat destruction, pollution (heavy metals, plastic and noise), commercial shipping traffic, destructive fishing (dynamite, over-fishing and excessive exploitation), and climate change. It is essential that we work together and "undo" these problems that are now wreaking havoc on our biosphere. We have to stop what may become a crescendo of habitat collapse and species loss.

With this pledge in our hearts, we will be returning onboard *Mir* to Sri Lanka in November 2012 to learn about the populations of great whales off the coast of Sri Lanka and make recommendations to the government to help mitigate these escalating threats.

For More Information

Please join us and become part of this emerging team breathing new life into the Indian Ocean Marine Mammal Sanctuary at www.biospherefoundation.org