

RECORD OF A PLUMBEOUS DOLPHIN (*SOUSA PLUMBEA*
CUVIER) FROM DUDUYA RIVER, NORTH BENGAL, INDIA

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(With 1 Map and 2 Plates)

INTRODUCTION

A single specimen of a dolphin was caught accidentally in fishermen's net in Duduya river, Thalsabari, near Dhupguri, Jalpaiguri district [see Map] West Bengal, (26°30' & 89°05') on December 5, 1985. The animal remained unidentified but local press apparently being unfamiliar with the animal, published notes on the same, indicating that it may be a peculiar "susu". The dolphin was kept in the river, near a bathing ghat, tied with a rope for 20 days, while it was reported to make loud sound or call, typical for cetaceans. Unfortunately the information of its capture, while it was still alive, did not reach the Zoological Survey of India. However, through the initiative of the second author (M. C.). Its photographs were taken by an officer of the Geological Survey of India (S. B. Nag) and handed over to the Director of Museum Division of G. S. I., Dr. K. K. Basu.

The photographs [Plates II, III] reached the author (A. K. G.) on the last part of December 1985, through the courtesy of Dr. K. K. Basu, after the death of the dolphin, along with notes on weight, length and width. Considering the distinctive features of its snout, colour, characteristic dorsal fin, the specimen is identified as the Plumbeous Dolphin, *Sousa plumbea* (Cuvier, 1829).

The specimen measured 2m and weighs 120 kg, with a snout 0.17× the length of body. It had a uniform plumbeous grey colour.

DISTRIBUTION

Blanford (1888) stated that the plumbeous dolphin is known from "Madras, Malabar, Karachi, Burma and Ceylon". Dusmier (in Jardine, 1837) noted that the Plumbeous dolphin is abundant in Malabar coast, frequents the shore and pursue the shoals of pilchards. Marcuzzi and Pilleri (1971) in their paper on the Zoogeography of Cetacea, considered

plumbea as an endemic species in India-Malaya region and quoted Hershkovitz (1966) for detailed distribution-range which extend from "Indian Ocean to the strait of Malacca in the east ; also from Malabar coast to the Arabian Sea, Red Sea and Suez Canal". Pilleri and Gihri

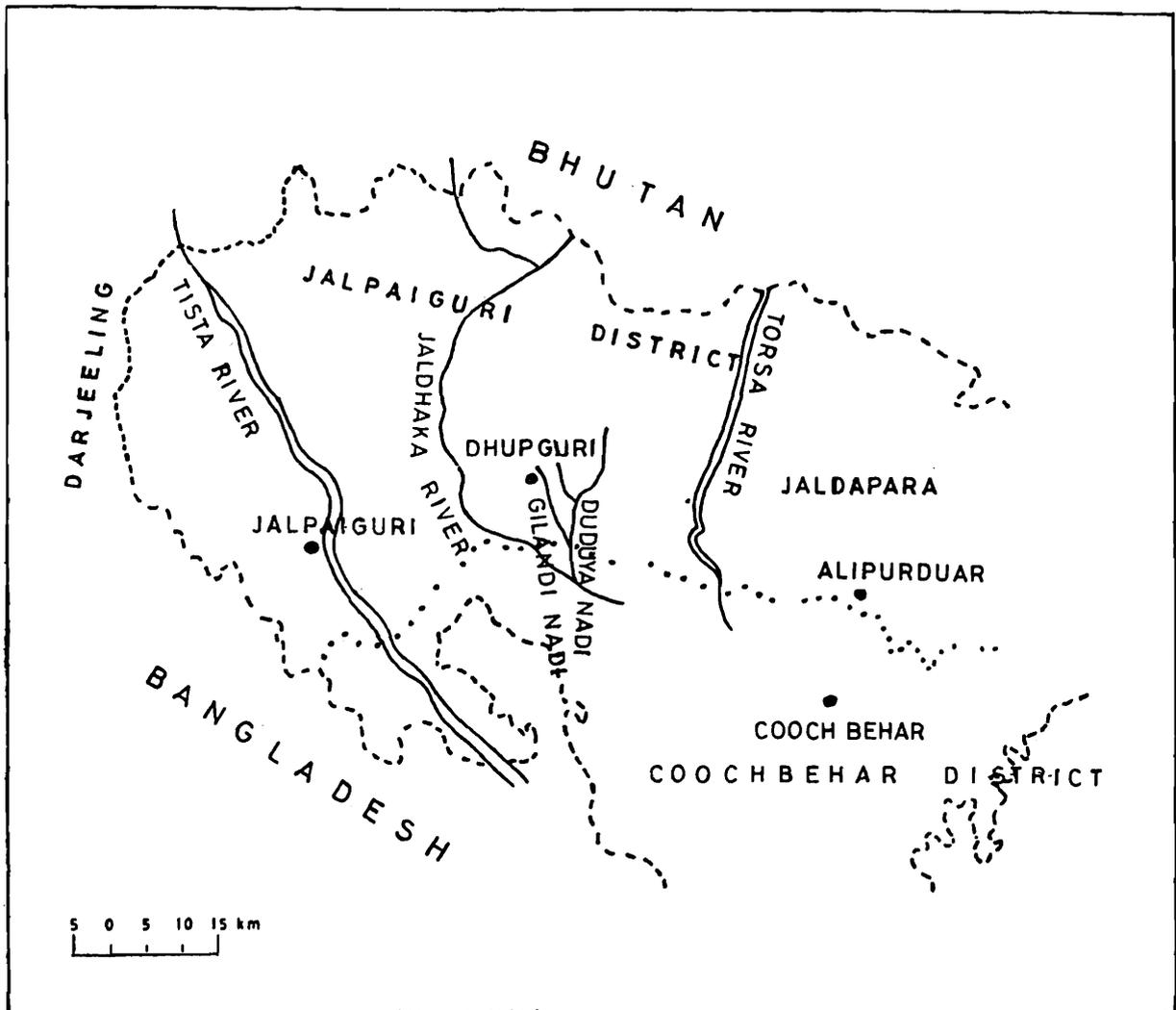


Fig. 1. Map showing Duduya River system and Dhupguri area.

(1972) while investigating Cetaceans of Pakistan observed the species to penetrate mangrove zones and also in Dubba mouth, Pitiano mouth—in wide open water and also in Khari Creek and Kudi Creek, not far away from open sea in Pakistan. Pilleri and Gihri (*op. cit.*) mentioned that while the known distribution range were Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea, the Suez Canal and the coast of South Africa, it is also assumed to occur in Bay of Bengal, the South China Sea and off the coast of Sarawak. Lalmoan (1982) provided description of fetus of *Sousa plumbea* from southwest coast of India.

DISCUSSION

Considering the information available, the present record from North Bengal appear to be the first record of migration of Plumbeous dolphin in a freshwater riverine system at least 250 km., away from the coast.

Blanford (1888) has mentioned about the capability of these animals to adapt to both salt and freshwater eco-systems. However, it appears intriguing as to how the animal found its way up through the Bramhaputra River System to the Jaldhaka river and then to Duduya river in the Dhupguri area. The question of the Cetaceans getting the stranded has been discussed at length in a recent paper by Vodden (1985). Cetaceans are stated to use directional sonar, when in shallow water and may receive echoes from every direction and thus may be confused. Whether this upstream travel was caused by confusion is difficult to ascertain but rarity of record of such catch tends to support the notion.

Pilleri and Gühr (1972) have provided a brief account of their observations on swimming behaviour in Pakistan and results of osteological and taxonomical investigation of the Plumbeous Dolphin and discussed about the habitual and osteological differences between *Sousa plumbea* and four other congeneric species viz. *barmensis* Lydekker, *chinensis* Osbeck, *teuszii* Kükenthal and the most closely related *lentiginosa* Owen. It appears that out of the 20 skeletons of *plumbea* examined, only one, the type (a 3053, Mus. Nat. d'Hist. Nat., Paris) from Malabar coast, originates from India. As such the detailed osteological examination of the specimen (to be reported upon separately) will be of interest.

SUMMARY

A Plumbeous Dolphin, *Sousa plumbea* (Cuvier) is recorded for the first time from North Bengal in Duduya River near Dhupguri. The distribution range and existing state of knowledge on the species is discussed along with notes on the specimen reported upon.

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