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High resolution images are available on request.

Humpback whale dies in Thames

A 28ft (9.5m) humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) was found dead in the River Thames near the Dartford Bridge early on Saturday morning.

Scientists from the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and members of British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) received reports that a whale had been spotted in the Thames on Thursday afternoon, but no further sightings were made until the animal was found dead on Saturday and subsequently recovered by a Port of London Authority (PLA) patrol boat.

The team of scientists from ZSL, who were also involved with the rescue of the Thames whale in 2006 and the mass dolphin stranding in Cornwall last year, carried out a post-mortem examination of the juvenile male humpback whale in-situ in facilities provided by the PLA. The post-mortem examination was undertaken as part of the Defra funded collaborative UK Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme (CSIP), which is managed by ZSL.

Rob Deaville, project manager of the CSIP said "Preliminary results from the post-mortem examination indicate that it may have died as a result of starvation, but further tests are still pending and may provide additional

information about what happened to this whale”.

This is the first time that a humpback whale has been found in the Thames. The last humpback whale found stranded around the UK coast line was in 2007 at Port Talbot in Wales.

Rob Deaville added “There have only been 12 strandings of humpback whales in the UK in the last 20 years and this is an incredibly unusual event. Although it’s obviously a sad outcome in this instance, the post-mortem examination has given us a rare opportunity to examine a truly extraordinary animal at close quarters. Information gathered through examinations like these will hopefully help further our understanding of such animals and also help contribute to improving their conservation status.”

Strandings that undergo post-mortem examination can also provide a unique insight into causes of death, diseases, environmental contaminant levels, reproductive patterns, diet and other aspects of the general health of cetacean populations in the seas around our coasts. This provides important baseline data to help detect any future outbreaks of disease, unusual mortality events or responses to environmental change (e.g. climate change). Information from the post-mortem examination will be added to a database on stranded cetaceans, which is managed by the CSIP and provides an essential resource for identifying factors which may cause cetaceans to strand, helping to prevent these events happening in the future.

End

Editorial Notes

- Founded in 1826, the **Zoological Society of London (ZSL)** is an international scientific, conservation and educational charity: our key role is the conservation of animals and their habitats. The Society runs ZSL London Zoo and ZSL Whipsnade Zoo, carries out scientific research at the Institute of Zoology and is actively involved in field conservation overseas. For further information please visit www.zsl.org.
- The collaborative **UK Cetacean Strandings Investigation**

Programme (CSIP) has been running since 1990 and is funded by Defra and the Devolved Administrations. The CSIP coordinate the investigation of all whales, dolphins and porpoises (collectively known as cetaceans), marine turtles and basking sharks that strand around the UK coastline. As well as documenting each individual stranding, the CSIP retrieve a proportion for investigation at post-mortem to allow the cause of death to be established. The data and samples collected during research have also facilitated a large number of international collaborations, which have addressed a wide range of scientific questions. Partner organisations in the CSIP are Zoological Society of London, the Natural History Museum, Scottish Agricultural College (Inverness) and Marine Environmental Monitoring. Further information on the CSIP may be found at www.ukstrandings.org.

- The **Port of London Authority** (PLA) is a self-financing statutory authority. Its responsibilities include ensuring navigational safety along the Tidal Thames, promoting use of the River and safeguarding the environment. It also works in partnership with commercial, recreational, community and amenity groups and organisations to ensure that the Thames continues to be a safe and enjoyable environment for trade, recreation and tourism. Further information on the PLA may be found at www.pla.co.uk/
- **British Divers Marine Life Rescue** (BDMLR) is an organisation dedicated to the rescue and well being of all marine animals in distress around the UK. It has a network of trained and professional marine mammal medics who respond to call outs from the general public, HM Coastguard, Police and RSPCA. BDMLR is a registered charity and is operated entirely by volunteers, with rescue teams which are on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Further information on BDMLR can be found at www.bdmlr.org.uk. The 24 hour hotline is 01825 765 546.