



# Examining Taiwan's Cetacean Conservation History Through the First Blue Whale Stranding in Nearly a Century

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## Abstract

At noon on January 25, 2020, the Marine Biology and Cetacean Research Center at National Cheng Kung University (MB&CR Center at NCKU) received a phone call from an officer of the 10th Patrol Command of the Coast Guard Administration, informing that a large dead stranded whale had been found on the beach in Chang-Bin Township, Taitung County, on Taiwan's eastern coast. The personnel from the MB&CR Center at NCKU immediately set out for the scene. Measurements taken on-site, as well as external features and subsequent necropsy evidence, indicated that it was a Blue Whale with a body length of 20 meters. Reviewing the historical documents and records of the relationship between Blue Whales and Taiwan, the last connection can be traced back to 1938, when there was still a whaling station near Kenting at the southern tip of Taiwan. The data shows that the last recorded Blue Whale capture in the waters around Taiwan was from that period. Since then, there have been no sightings of cetaceans around Taiwan.

Reflecting on Taiwan's animal conservation policies and actions, the Wildlife Conservation Act of Taiwan was enacted in 1989, but the Schedule of Protected Species didn't list all Cetacea spp. until 1990. Now, there are at least 33 different cetaceans have been observed or reported in Taiwan. The first marine animal stranding network, Taiwan Cetacean Stranding Network (TCSN), which was managed by Forestry Bureau (of the Council of Agriculture, Executive Yuan) was established in 1996 and implemented till 2019. After Ocean Conservation Administration (of Ocean Affairs Council, Executive Yuan) was established in Kaohsiung, Taiwan on April 28, 2018, the newly system of Stranding Network has been shifted to and set up "Marine Animal Rescue Network, MARN" in Jan. 2019.

Since 1996, more than 2000 stranding cetaceans have been reported and 1/4 of them were live stranded individuals. Once got the stranding network report or call, the member of MARN will immediately start up and collaborate with the Coast Guard Administration and deal with the stranded individual on site. For the live stranding event, the network member will transport the stranded individual to the rescue station (for example: the cetacean rescue station in Tainan) and manage to perform the whole set of cetacean rescue, medical cares and rehabilitation. For the dead stranding event, the network member will perform the essential procedures (measurement, sampling, or necropsy, if possible, also go for CT-scan) depending on the decomposed condition of the carcass. For the Condition Code 2 (means fresh dead) event, we go further focus on the academic research, with pathology, CT-scan and necropsy for medical/scientific evidence on marine mammal health and basic research.