

**SHORT COMMUNICATION**

**First sighting of false killer whales (*Pseudorca crassidens*)  
in the northern Aegean Sea**

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**Abstract**

A sighting of a group of false killer whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*) was reported for the first time in the northern Aegean Sea. It was also the first reported sighting in 25 years for the Aegean Sea. Eight individuals in total were recorded in a footage taken by a local fisherman. During the hauling of the handline, it was observed that one juvenile came to the line to play with it. The information of such sightings of rare species is valuable to understand the regional biodiversity.

**Key words:** False killer whale, *Pseudorca crassidens*, northern Aegean Sea

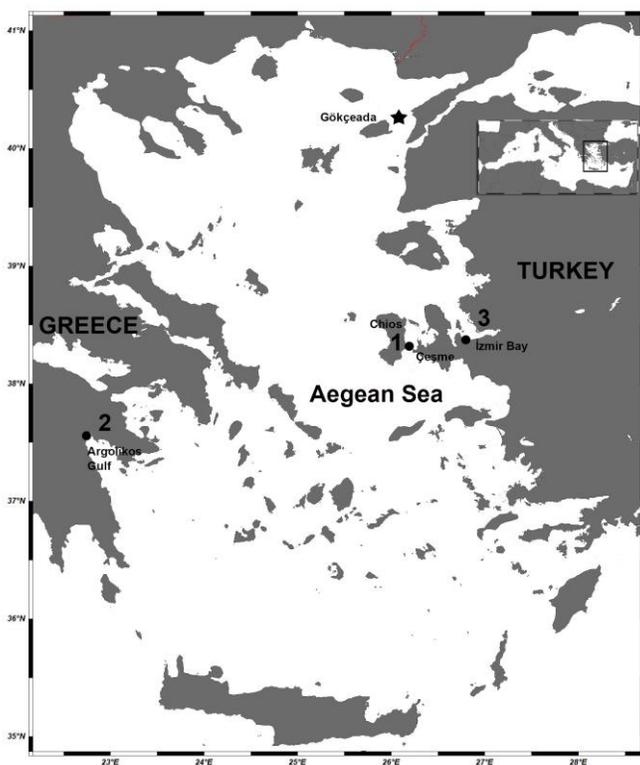
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False killer whales, *Pseudorca crassidens* (Owen, 1846), are usually found in tropical to warm temperate zones, generally in slightly deep, offshore waters of oceans. In addition, sometimes they appear in higher latitude or move into shallow waters (Baird 2018; Crofts *et al.* 2019). They are occasionally observed in some semi-enclosed seas such as the Mediterranean Sea, for which they are recognized as a visitor species (Reeves and Notarbartolo di Sciara 2006; Jefferson *et al.* 2015). Between 1988 and 2013, nine sightings and eight stranding events were reported in the Mediterranean Sea, three of which were in the Aegean Sea (Notarbartolo di Sciara and Birkun 2010; Ryan *et al.* 2013). Between Chios Island (Greece) and Çeşme (Turkey), at least seven individuals were sighted and photographed in 1992, one dead individual stranded in Argolikos Gulf (Greece) in 1993 (Frantzis *et al.* 2003) and one individual stranded alive and died later in İzmir Bay (Turkey) in 1995 (Öztürk and Öztürk

1998) (Figure 1). The present paper reports the first sighting of false killer whales in the northern Aegean Sea. It was also the first reported sighting in 25 years for the Aegean Sea.

A group of false killer whales was reported 6 nm off the coast of Gökçeada Island, Turkey, in the northern Aegean Sea on 21 January 2020 by a resident fisherman of the island to the authors. The fisherman used a single cross-hook handline of around 150 m in total length, baited with alive squids. From his video footage totally eight individuals were counted. The animals clearly showed peculiar features of the false killer whale, such as a rounded head, the angle of mouth gape, and the shape of dorsal fin (Figure 2). During the hauling of the handline, it was observed that one juvenile came to the line to play with it (Figure 3). The footage (3'48'') is available at; <https://youtu.be/hsiptMseBvg> (accessed on 1 April 2020).



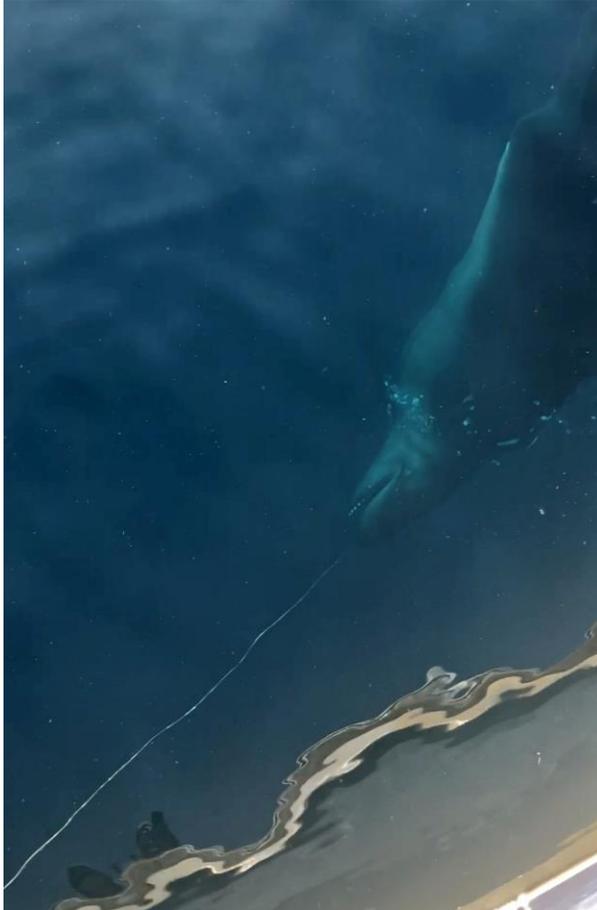
**Figure 1.** Locations of the records of false killer whales in the Aegean Sea  
1. sighting in 1992 (Frantzis *et al.* 2003), 2. dead stranding in 1993 (Frantzis *et al.* 2003),  
3. live stranding in 1995 (Öztürk and Öztürk 1998),  
star: this study



**Figure 2.** Captured screenshots of false killer whales from the footage

The false killer whale is one of the species that occasionally steals fish from fishing gears. They have been taken in fisheries, both directly and incidentally as bycatch (Baird 2009). False killer whales have been killed or seriously

injured incidentally in the longline fishery in Hawaiian waters, the Indian Ocean, American Samoa, western North Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea (Bearzi 2002; Baird 2009; 2018).



**Figure 3.** A captured screenshot of false killer whale playing with the handline

According to IUCN Red List, the false killer whale is currently assessed as Near Threatened (NT) at global level, although the data available seem to be insufficient to understand any population trend (Baird 2018). Therefore, the information of any sightings of such rare species is valuable to understand the distribution of the species as well as the regional biodiversity. Fishermen can contribute to our basic knowledge on cetaceans and their interactions with fisheries in Turkish waters. Such cooperation should be encouraged further through citizen science projects and initiatives.

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## Kuzey Ege Denizi'nde ilk yalancı katil balina (*Pseudorca crassidens*) gözlemi

### Öz

Kuzey Ege Denizi'nde bir grup yalancı katil balina (*Pseudorca crassidens*) gözlemi ilk defa rapor edildi. Ayrıca bu gözlem 25 yıldır tüm Ege Denizi'ndeki bilinen ilk kayıttır. Yerel bir balıkçının çektiği görüntülerde toplam sekiz birey kaydedildi. El oltası tekneye çekilirken genç bir bireyin oltanın bedeni ile oynadığı görülmektedir. Bu gibi nadir türlerin gözlemleri türün bölgesel biyoçeşitliliğini anlamak için önemlidir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Yalancı katil balina, *Pseudorca crassidens*, Kuzey Ege Denizi

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