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Rare whale washed up in Connemara

An unusual whale has been found on a small beach in Ballynakill Bay, Connemara. It is the second whale to be found in Connemara since Christmas; a Sperm whale was found on Omey Island on December 28.

The whale was found by local guide and author Paul Phelan of Walk Connemara last Saturday (January 7). Paul noticed the large animal while finishing a walk over nearby Tully Mountain. The stony beach is in the beautiful townland of Letter Beg, on the Renvyle peninsula in County Galway.

“There was quite a swell on the sea. I guess the creature had been washed up in the recent windy weather we’ve had” said Paul Phelan.

After reporting the stranding to the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, the whale has been confirmed as a Cuvier’s Beaked whale (for details see <http://www.iwdg.ie/iscope/strandings/details.asp?id=3730>). With their distinctive mouth, Cuvier’s are also known as the “Goose-Beaked” whale. The Irish Name is Míol mór gobach Cuvier.

Cuvier’s grow up to about 7 meters in length and weigh 2,500 – 3,000 kg (2–3 tonnes); they live for forty years but are rarely seen alive. Like Sperm whales, Cuvier’s feed on squid along with other deep sea fish.

Although less is known about Beaked whales than almost any other group of large mammals, they are known to be the deepest-diving air-breathing animals. A Cuvier’s Beaked whale set the record in 2005 with a dive to a depth of 1,899 metres – an incredible 85 minutes with just one breath. Beaked whales are known to be sensitive to noisy sounds; naval sonar exercises have been blamed for whales’ deaths in recent years.

Reported Irish strandings of Cuvier’s Beaked whales have increased in recent years. There were two Cuvier’s recorded in 2011, both in Kerry. In 2000, four were recorded. Between 1901 and 1995, there was average of just 1 every 4 years. It may be that reporting has become more efficient. All records are validated and available on www.iwdg.ie.

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For photos see <http://www.walkconnemara.com/events.html> and Facebook: WalkConnemara

(http://www.facebook.com/pages/Walk-Connemara/101594756584206?ref=tn_tnmn); high resolution versions available on request.