



It was summer 1981. My wife Lucia and I with some friends Piero di Gregorio, Franco Capodarte, Leonardo Capodarte and Claudia Capodarte all of whom are members of Gruppo Ricercatori ed Operatori Subacquei (G.R.O. Sub. - an underwater association that defends and photographs marine wildlife, of which I am the president) were in navigation with our boat the "Maria Gabriella" (15 m.) in the south Tirreno Sea (Mediterranean sea) between the islands of "Lipari" and "Salina" in the "Eolie Archipelago" in front of the east side of north Sicily where the sea is very, very deep 2,000 m. (Canyon di Stromboli) A place where the Giant Squid (*Architeutis* sp.) lives!

We were searching for marine mammals. The weather was fine. The sun was shining, the sea quiet, no wind.

Then it happened.

We received a radio message that a whale was trapped near Lipari and Salina Islands and it was dangerous to navigate in the area. We decided to investigate!

We found the whale 4 hours later. It was a big (15 m.) Sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) in



a trap, set by professional marlin fishermen who use forbidden, very long drift nets (1-3 km.)!

The Sperm whale was still breathing! So we immediately entered in the water and saw massive injuries to his head.

We began to cut off the net and to photograph the event. We heard the "tic-tic-tic" of his sonar, we saw many scraps of his skin in the sea, so some of us began to caress his soft skin near the eyes. He looked at us and we felt that he was understanding that we were saving him !!!

We had no fear when we cut the net away



from his head. And, as his jaws opened for the first time in a long while, we felt that he understood that we were his friends!!

The only fear we had was from sharks, as there was blood in the water, but they didn't appear.

It was most difficult to cut off the netting from the tail because he began to wave it up and down making the divers that were working there, feel very nauseous!

After we cut away the net-trap near the tail he began to swim away. After a few meters and with only a little piece of net still attached to his tail he turned to us, to say "thank you" and as silent as we found him he slowly swam away and out of sight.

To this day we have never heard of anyone

who has witnessed such an event.

It took six hours of hard work to rescue our "Moby Dick" but we were all very happy to do this rescue and give life back to a marine mammal which would have surely died. All of us are now interested in Sperm whales all over the world and would like to contact anybody who is involved with rescuing large marine mammals everywhere.

The net-traps are very dangerous for marine mammals so my association (G.R.O.Sub.) and others (WWF-Greepace-Mare Nostrum-Italia nostra-) lobbied our government to forbid this type of fishing for marlin. After that the European parliament outlawed this long net 2-3 km (2 miles) from the year 2001 but mostly, we fear the Japanese who fish in the Mediterranean Sea!

All u/w photographs were taken with a Nikonos III + 15 mm Lens - Available light . 1/60 F. 5,6- 8. Kodak Ektachrome film.

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