FIRST FIND OF THE NAMIB GOLDEN MOLE *(Eremitalpa granti namibensis)*

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In the first half of the nineteenth century Captain Alexander collected a Golden Mole on one of his trips to Damaraland. This specimen, now lost, was described by Ogilby in 1838 as *Chrysochloris damarensis*. Unfortunately no exact locality was given and since then no more specimens of this species have been found.

Only some years ago, some fractured Golden Mole skulls were found in owl-pellets from Sossus Vlei in the Namib Desert. Bauer and Niethammer described a new subspecies of *Eremitalpa granti*, namely *E. g. namibensis*, on these finds. They did not exclude a possible synonymity between *C. damarensis* and the last-mentioned as insufficient comparative material was available.

In November 1962 the first Chrysochlorid tracks were noticed by the author on the Obib dunes near Rooilepel, just north of the Orange River in Diamond area No 1. These were not recognized as such at that stage. They could have been made by either subspecies of *E. granti*, as the typical form is known from Little Namaqualand. On another trip to South West Africa during April 1963 the same tracks were recognized on the dunes south of the Desert Research Station at Gobabeb (± 15° 5' E, 23° 40' S).

These tracks were usually in the form of winding and recrossing shallow furrows, roughly 5 cm. wide, ending abruptly where the mole had emerged or disappeared. Sometimes they would cross the leeward sides of the dunes along the bank of the Kuiseb River in almost straight lines, as if they had been heading for a certain spot. On other occasions, especially higher amongst the semi-stable as well as shifting dunes, one could follow these furrows, which would end suddenly and continue as tiny footprints for long distances, sometimes for several hundred yards. At short intervals one would find places where it seemed as if the animal had tried to burrow, found the sand too hard, and continued with its wanderings until it eventually found a suitable area where it would start its furrows again. Finally it would disappear underground without leaving any tunnel in the soft windblown sand. On various occasions unsuccessful attempts were made to collect specimens at night by digging at the end of these furrows.

Only in October 1963, on a second visit to this area and after many more unsuccessful attempts, two specimens could be secured. This was achieved after a severe sandstorm had raged during the afternoon. While walking at night with lamps fresh furrows were detected and, by digging, these specimens were exposed about 15 cm. below the surface. These were the first two complete specimens of this subspecies.

These animals inhabit the windblown sand-dunes and seem to prefer those with tufts of grass or bushes. They are fairly plentiful along the river, where sand-dunes are overrunning riverine forest and brushwood of *Acacia* and *Salvadora*, but are also well distributed amongst the high dunes where *Aristida* sp forms islands of more solidified and stable sand. Since then three more specimens have been collected. Some of these have been unearthed during the day close to where the furrows ended. They kept well in captivity, feeding on mealworms and caterpillars.

Comparing the description of *C. damarensis* with these specimens proved that these are indeed *E. g. namibensis*. The distribution seems to be confined to the shifting and semi-stable sanddunes of the central and southern Namib Desert, of which the major part is restricted area as it falls within the Diamond areas Nos 1 and 2. Because of their inhospitable environment and their occurrence in a prohibited area, the only real dangers to these secretive animals are their normal predators i.e. mainly owls and to a lesser extent snakes and possibly jackals. They might fall prey to these while moving about on the surface.

On behalf of myself and the other staff members who helped to collect these specimens I should like to express gratitude to the Board of Trustees of the Transvaal Museum and of the Namib Desert Research Station, who made it possible for us to carry out these investigations.

THE FIN WHALE *(Balaenoptera physalus)*

Distribution. Found in both, the northern and southern hemispheres but the two groups are believed not to mix. It is as widely distributed as the blue whale and like that species is not often found in equatorial waters. Besides the great oceans it has been recorded in the Mediterranean. There is some evidence to suggest that a majority of individual whales may return to the same area each year to breed.

Status. The second largest cetacean after the blue whale, occasionally reaching over 80 feet, weighing about 40–80 tons and yielding on the average about 80 barrels. The most common of the large rorquals and now economically of the greatest significance. Numerically substantially reduced and although less immediately threatened than either the blue or the humpback, stocks are now far below the level required to sustain maximum yields.

Estimated numbers. The decline of the fin whale is shown by statistics of average population size provided by the International Whaling Commission:

1955/56	:	110,400	1959/60	:	65,700
1956/57	:	101,700	1960/61	:	59,700
1957/58	:	89,000	1961/62	:	45,300
1958/59	:	88,600	1962/63	:	40,000

Breeding rate in wild. Gestation period about 11 months; size at birth about 21 feet: calf suckled for about 7 months: single calves are the general rule but multiple births have been recorded, including sextuplets.

Reasons for decline. Before 1904 modern whaling was almost entirely restricted to the northern hemisphere and the southern hemisphere populations were free from exploitation on the antarctic feeding grounds. Improvement in the efficiency of modern whaling methods during the last 30–40 years has resulted in a complete reversal of this situation, and today 60% of the total world catch comes from the Antarctic. The fin whale now furnishes the bulk of the antarctic catch. In the 1961/62 season it provided 95.9% of the combined catch of blue and fin whales, the highest percentage so far recorded. Of the 27,176 rorquals (blue, fin, sei) taken during the 1955/56 season, 25,289 were fins: 25,837 were killed during the 1958/59 season; 26,438 in 1961/62 and 18,668 in 1962/63.

Protective measures already taken. Females with calves are fully protected; no fin whale smaller than 57 feet may be taken in the Antarctic, and this protects most of the immatures. By means of the 'Blue Whale Unit' formula (1 blue = 2 fins = 2½ humpbacks = 6 sei) the catch can be limited without the necessity of any distinction between species. The quota authorised by the Convention varies from year to year. The previous quota of 15,000 B. W. U. is being reduced to 10,000 B.W.U. during the 1963/64 season.

Measures proposed. The decline of the blue whale resulted in the fin assuming first place as the most important commercial species and its extinction would result in the disruption of the greater part of the whaling industry. For this reason it is very much in the interests of the industry to ensure the continuance of the species. The regulations introduced by the International Whaling Commission are designed for this purpose but they depend on voluntary acceptance by all governments whose nationals take part in antarctic whaling.

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