

of fish schooling at between 60 and 90 feet of water.

The skies were quiet as we cruised along in the bright sunshine and then the first pelagic birds appeared. Two were present and working the waters just off the stern of the boat. They were approximately the size of a small blackbird, dark in colour with hooked wings, delicate flight just above the water, a straight tail and a white rump. We had located our first storm-petrels of the day. As these birds had a straight tail and a contiguous white rump patch, they were Wilson's Storm-Petrels. We were about 2.5 km off East Lake at the time. The boat's crew indicated that the storm-petrels arrived each year at the time the bluefin tuna did.

As we continued towards the waters off East Point, we sighted more storm-petrels either as single birds or small groups of up to six. Suddenly, two storm-petrels with V-shaped tails appeared with four Wilson's Storm-Petrels. They came within 40 metres of the boat and the slight dark central band splitting the tail rump combined with the V-shaped tail marked the distinctive features of the Leach's Storm-Petrel. Our excitement level went up as we were still less than an hour into the journey.

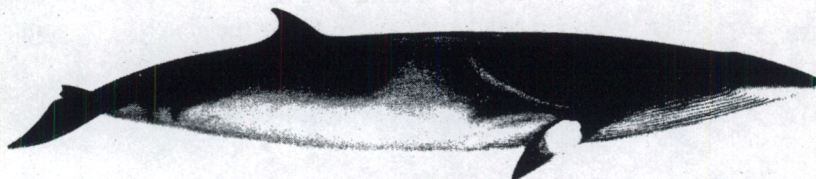
Off East Point, the Captain and First Mate started preparing the tuna fishing rig. When Captain MacNeil pulled out a bag of long narrow balloons and started blowing one up, I realized that my mental image of tuna fishing was about to be altered. The bright balloon, when properly inflated, was set aside while a tuna fishing pole was baited with a live mackerel. The mackerel was put over the side and Jeff fed out about 60 to 70 feet of line after which he attached the balloon to the line with an elastic like that used for rural mail. The balloon served like bobber with the advantage that a sudden strike would pop it off the line. The first balloon float was fed out until it was over 150 metres from the boat. Contrary to the images evoked by Hemingway's writing, the pole was set in a reinforced hole in the side of the boat. A plastic tube was attached with elastics to the line along the pole. When a tuna strikes this setup, the elastics release and the plastic tube runs down the taut line to shield the line from the bluefin tuna's sharp teeth. Two more poles were set up in a similar manner at shorter distances off the same side of the boat. One of these lines fished the area roughly below the boat.

Next Captain Jeff dug out a kite which was rigged to a fishing pole and a larger, heavier balloon. A tank of helium was brought out from the cabin and the balloon was blown up to a diameter of over two feet. The balloon was taped to a kite of a similar diameter and launched off a lighter fishing pole than that used for the tuna line. A self release swivel was located on this line and the line of a fourth tuna pole was placed in this swivel. This set up was established off the opposite side of the boat from the deep baits. It was used to have the mackerel bait swim just at the surface of the water simulating an injured mackerel. Thus, we learned a new use for the term "go fly a kite"!

Preparing the baits lead to the release of some mackerel scales over the side of the boat and more storm-petrels appeared following the sparkling scales. As we drifted with the tides several kilometres first north and then east of East Point lighthouse, we were on the outer edge of some 50 tuna boats. As the morning progressed, we were joined first by some immature Northern Gannet and later some mature gannet. Periodically, one or more Wilson's Storm-Petrel would fly by. On some occasions, they passed within 10 metres of the boat.

As I scanned the horizon for pelagic birds, a large black head popped out of the water about a kilometre from the boat and after it sunk below the surface the sharply hooked dorsal fin appeared. Within the next hour we were watching the repeated surfacing of at least three whales. On no occasion was spray plume observed on surfacing. Thus we concluded that these were Minke whales. Throughout the day, we were delighted to watch the whales surface, usually several times, before they disappeared below the surface.

During conversations with the Captain and First Mate, they revealed that whales were seen regularly in these waters at this time of year. In addition, shearwaters were often seen. Unfortunately, we had no luck on this day with shearwaters as we did not see any in the 9.5 hours we spent on the water. Four tuna fish passed through the sonar beam of the boat and, while each caused considerable excitement, none took a bait.



MINKE WHALE