Dead whale tells tale of scientific discovery

Its DNA, computer models reveal where sperm whale came from and what it ate

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It was whaled and smelted, then its blubber and meat were boiled and consumed four years ago, researchers found out recently.

In a paper published on April 3 in the journal Scientific Reports, the scientists from the National University of Singapore’s Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum made a discovery that could help explain the mystery of the 14-metre-long sperm whale whose remains were washed up along the shores of Pulau Ubin near Singapore’s Changi Beach on June 22, 2016.

The team, led by the museum’s director, Dr. Daily, and entomologist Dr. Lee, conducted a multi-disciplinary study of the whale, which was confirmed to be a male, using DNA analysis of the tissue found in the whale’s stomach to determine its origin and diet.

The scientists found that the whale, which was estimated to be around 20 years old, had consumed around 50kg of food in its last meal, including a large number of squid, small fish, and whale bones. The whale also had traces of plastic in its stomach, suggesting that it had likely died of starvation.

Dr. Daily said: “Our findings suggest that the sperm whale in Singapore was likely feeding on squid, as evidenced by the DNA analysis of the tissue found in its stomach. The presence of plastic in its stomach also suggests that the whale may have died of starvation due to the lack of food availability.

The discovery of the sperm whale’s remains in Singapore is significant as it is the first time such a large marine mammal has been found in the country. It also highlights the need for continued research to better understand the movements and diet of these mysterious creatures.