Sperm whale found dead on the Spanish coast was killed after swallowing 64lbs of PLASTIC waste including bags, nets, ropes and a jerry can

- The body of the young male sperm whale was found at Cabo de Palos in February
- The creature was around 10 metres long and weighed more than six tonnes
- An autopsy uncovered 29 kilos of plastic waste in its intestines and stomach
- The official cause of death was an infection of the inner lining of the stomach

A sperm whale found dead on the coast of southern Spain was killed by swallowing 29 kilos (64 pounds) of plastic, government officials have confirmed.

During an autopsy of the creature, investigators uncovered plastic bags, netting and a jerry can in the whale's digestive system.

The death of the marine mammal has prompted authorities to launch a campaign against dumping plastic waste at sea.
The body of the young male sperm whale, which was around 10 metres (33 feet) long and weighed more than six tonnes, was discovered washed ashore at Cabo de Palos in Murcia at the end of February.

Experts at the region’s El Valle Wildlife Rescue Centre, which carried out the procedure, said it had been unable to digest or excrete the plastic it ingested.

The official cause of death was peritonitis, an infection of the inner lining of the stomach.

Consuelo Rosauro, director-general for the natural environment in the region, told The Telegraph: ‘Many animals get trapped in the rubbish or ingest great quantities of plastic which end up causing their death.’

Sperm whales are found in most of the world’s oceans, except the high Arctic, and prefer deep waters.

They belong to the suborder of toothed whales and dolphins, known as odontocetes, and are one of the easiest whales to identify at sea.
The creatures gained their name during the days of commercial whaling.

Whalers thought that their large square heads were huge reservoirs for sperm, because when the head was cut open it was found to contain a milky white substance.

The exact current worldwide population is not known, but it is estimated at around 100,000.

The sperm whale, which subsists on a diet largely made up of squid and has a life expectancy roughly equivalent to a human’s at around 70 years, is listed as a vulnerable species.

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WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT SPERM WHALES?

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An intestinal secretion called ambergris found in sperm whales was used as a fixative in the perfume industry.

At one time, it was worth more than its weight in gold but this is no longer the case.

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Its skin is dark or brownish grey, with white markings around the lower jaw and underside. It has relatively short, stubby flippers and a low hump instead of a dorsal fin.
Its diet is largely made up of squid. The creatures have a life expectancy roughly equivalent to a human’s, at around 70 years.

Males grow to around 18.3 metres (60 feet), with females reaching 12 metres (40 feet). Their young, or calves, grow to around 3.5 metres (11 feet). They have a maximum weight of around 57,000 kilograms (125 tonnes) for males.

The sperm whale’s huge head, which is up to 1/3 of its overall body length, houses the heaviest brain in the animal kingdom.

It also contains a cavity large enough for a small car to fit inside which holds a yellowish wax known as spermaceti oil, thought to help in buoyancy control when diving and act as an acoustic lens.

They have between 40 and 52 teeth in their long, narrow lower jaw which are thick and conical, and can grow to 20cm (eight inches) long and weigh 1kg (two pounds) each.

The sperm whale is one of the deepest diving mammals in the world, regularly making dives of up to 400 metres (1,300 feet) sometimes reaching depths of up to two to three kilometres (one to two miles) it is thought to be able to hold its breath for up to two hours, although 45 minutes is the average dive time.

Sperm whales are found in most of the world’s oceans, except the high Arctic, and prefer deep waters.

The exact current worldwide population is not known, but it is estimated at around 100,000. The sperm whale is listed as a vulnerable species.
The Murcia government’s campaign will be run in collaboration with the European Environmental Association, under the Socioeconomic Promotion of the Environment department of the regional government.

It will include eleven beach cleaning sessions and nineteen talks and audiovisual presentations in educational centres.

Waste collected as part of the cleaning sessions will be catalogued and analysed to determine its origin.

Plastics in the area threaten the bottlenose striped and common dolphin, the grey and common pilot whale, the sperm whale and the fin whale.

In addition to these cetaceans, the presence of plastics also affects loggerhead turtles, which has increased its presence at nesting sites in the region.