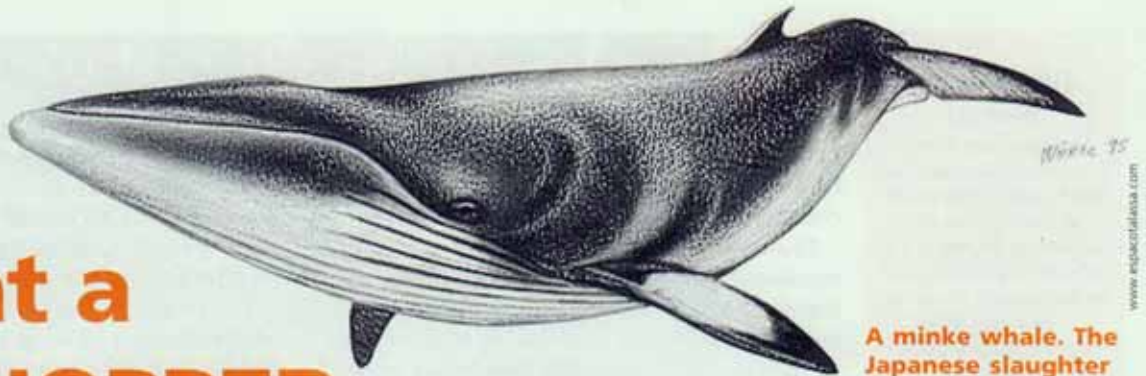


# What a WHOPPER

by Alwyn Marriage



A minke whale. The Japanese slaughter 935 minkes each year for "scientific research".

WHEN AN unfortunate whale ventured into the Thames earlier this year, its sad progress and demise aroused more than mere curiosity. Crowds came to watch the mighty cetacean, and every moment of the attempted rescue effort was recorded and beamed across the media networks of the world. It was, perhaps, not surprising that people were genuinely upset when this gentle giant of the seas lost its battle for life, for there is something almost awe-inspiring about such an immense creature living hidden in the ocean and posing no threat to human life.

While this little tragedy was being played out in the Thames, I was in New Zealand, where such occurrences are not quite so rare. On Farewell Spit, at the top of South Island, at least a hundred and twenty whales have been swept ashore and caught by the tide. Every time this happens, local people and tourists turn out in force to mount a rescue operation, with the result that only thirteen of the stranded whales have died. The animals are turned the right way up and copious wet towels and blankets are applied to help keep them damp until the tide returns. Sometimes whale pups can be heard crying for their mother while she is trapped on land. In the most recent rescue, a whale was re-floated twenty four hours after becoming stranded, and volunteers then swam out to sea with the whale for a while to make sure it was unharmed.

This story may, perhaps, illustrate why New Zealanders are so unhappy about the whaling operations being undertaken by Japan's Institute of Cetacean Research. The institute insists that it is hunting whales in order to examine their organs, stomachs and ear

plugs for research purposes, so that they can determine the age, breeding patterns, diet and toxin levels of the mammals. Hideki Morunuki, from Japan's Far Seas Fisheries Division, claims that Japan is acting within the terms of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), which allows the gathering of scientific information on the Southern



Ocean whale population. Greenpeace in New Zealand and, indeed, most of the public there, insist that research is possible without such slaughter, and they have been urging their Government to send a frigate to monitor the operation. The Government has so far declined to do this, and emotions have been running high.

The operation involves the slaughter of 935 minke and 10 fin whales, which are chased down and harpooned. It can then take twenty minutes or so of suffering before the whale finally stops breathing or drowns. The hunting takes place not only far outside Japan's territorial waters, but also within the IWC-approved Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary, which was set up to allow scientific study of the recovery of whale

**Greenpeace and other conservation organisations are working to achieve freedom for all the ocean's whales. Sensitive whale-watching must replace whale-killing as man's only exploitation of these superb animals.**