

Beached Pygmy Sperm whale rescued, but is later euthanized

Sept. 2, 2010 – Jensen Beach, FL



Dr. Juli Goldstein, left, Program Manager Stephen McCulloch, pointing, Kenny Kroell, left on stretcher, and Adam Schaefer, right on stretcher carry the whale to the Marine Mammal ambulance.

Early Tuesday morning, a live Pygmy Sperm whale came ashore during heavy surf conditions spawned by an offshore hurricane (Earle). The whale, more than 10 feet in length and weighing 873 lbs., first stranded near Bob Graham Beach just after 10am, but was pushed back out to sea by well intended beachgoers. A short while later the whale re-stranded 1 mile north of near Turtle Beach, where first responders from the Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and Florida Oceanographic Institute (FOI) managed to safely secure the animal above the high tide line.

Upon notification, marine mammal specialists from Harbor Branch at Florida Atlantic University's Marine Mammal Research and Conservation Program (MMRC), immediately dispatched a marine mammal ambulance, and arrived on scene in less than an hour.

During that time, FWC and FOI staff followed instructions from MMRC staff to shade and keep the animal cool and comfortable... while providing HBOI/FAU staff with detailed information about the whale's location and condition. Upon arrival MMRC staff veterinarian Dr. Juli Goldstein made an immediate medical evaluation, while MMRC staff Kenny Kroell and Adam Schaefer worked to monitor the whale's temperature, pulse and respirations.

MMRC Program Manager, Steve McCulloch coordinated the rescue effort and worked with Dr. Goldstein to obtain blood and other biological samples that may hold the key to the animal's reason for stranding, and further, help explain while this species of whale suffers from a condition known as Cardiomyopathy, a heart disease that also affects humans. Dr. Goldstein is conducting research to determine potential causes of this species specific heart disease with a \$100,000 Grant awarded from the John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Assistance Grant Program under the NOAA Office of Protected Resources

Following the brief medical evaluation and sampling, and with the help of several surfers and beachgoers, the whale was loaded aboard the HBOI-FAU ambulance. Unfortunately, and without suitable options for rehabilitation, the whale was humanely euthanized and taken to MMRC's

Necropsy Laboratory at Harbor Branch's Ft. Pierce, campus. Initial pathology findings confirm that this whale suffered from cardiomyopathy and heavy parasitological infestation. Further determinations and an 'exact cause' of death are pending a final analysis of tissues, blood and other samples collected from the whale.

Earlier, the same day, a 7 foot (dead) Pygmy Sperm whale was reported near Delay Beach, and local law enforcement detained two suspects who had apparently removed the whales tail fluke, which is against the law as marine mammals are a protected (regulated) species.

Pygmy Sperm whales, and the closely related Dwarf Sperm whale, are both pelagic species that live offshore and do not do well in rehabilitative environments.

Funding to respond to whale strandings such as this is provided by the Protect Florida Whales (PFW) Specialty License Plate. For information to obtain a PFW plate contact www.protectfloridawhales.org and www.protectwilddolphins.org

