

Finns and Flukes



A newsletter of the Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute Marine Mammal Research Program

Spring 2014

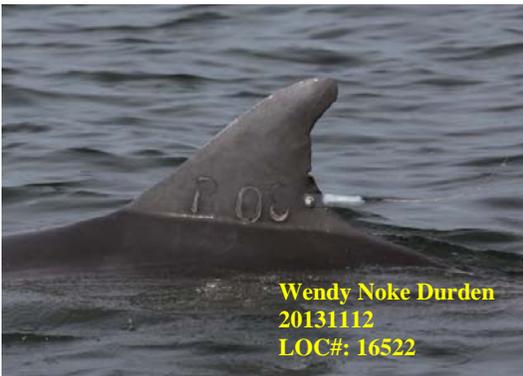
Volume 8

Mission: "to return to the sea some measure of the benefits derived from it"



Dolphin Rescued by HSWRI and SeaWorld Returned to the Indian River Lagoon

On June 12, 2013 a bottlenose dolphin was reported stranded at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, near Haulover Canal. Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute (HSWRI) scientists went to the scene and found a dolphin sunburned and stranded on a seagrass bed. Animal care and veterinary staff from SeaWorld Orlando transported the dolphin back to their Rescue and Rehabilitation Center where he received expert veterinary care for 5 months. During that time the dolphin was treated for various ailments including poor body condition, gastric parasites, and a respiratory infection and subsequently gained nearly 150 pounds. In consultation with stranding network coordinators at NOAA Fisheries the dolphin was released into the Indian River Lagoon in Melbourne on November 12, 2013. HSWRI scientists attached a VHF radio-transmitter to the trailing edge of the dolphin's dorsal fin to enable us to locate the dolphin and to monitor his condition post-release. Within 20 minutes of release he was observed socializing with other dolphins and engaging in probable feed behavior. We were able to locate and follow the dolphin freeze-branded R08 and nick-named Rodeo, for nearly a month following release. We determined that he preferred to spend his time in shallow to mid-depth water and spent most of his time traveling. The dolphin also spent more time playing with objects (seagrass, mangrove seedlings, etc), and socializing than other dolphins we have radio-tracked in the past. We were pleased to see that during our observations the dolphin maintained a healthy body condition, continued to successfully forage and socialized with other dolphins regularly. We are hopeful for Rodeo's continued success and are incredibly thankful to the animal care and veterinary staff at SeaWorld Orlando for their assistance in his rescue, rehabilitation and release!



Wendy Noke Durden
20131112
LOC#: 16522

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Thank You Bass Pro Shops, Palm Bay

We would like extend a huge thank you to Bass Pro Shops of Palm Bay, Florida for their recent donation of much needed supplies including flashlights, life vests, rain jackets, binoculars and waders. Their generosity is very much appreciated and we will be using the donated supplies to further our research efforts for many years to come! We are very fortunate to have such wonderful neighbors!



Indian River Lagoon Dolphin Released from Crab Pot Entanglement

On January 20, a dolphin was photographed swimming near Wabasso, Florida in the Indian River with a rope and crab pot buoy wrapped around her body. The urgency of the situation was enhanced by the fact that the adult female had a young calf in her care. In consultation with stranding network coordinators at NOAA Fisheries, rescue efforts were planned for January 27, 2014. Network members gathered from around the state including staff from Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution, SeaWorld Orlando, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the University of Florida, Volusia County Environmental Management, Georgia Aquarium Dolphin Conservation Field Station at Marineland, Clearwater Marine Aquarium and NOAA fisheries. A few hours into the search the pair was found swimming near spoil islands just north of Ft. Pierce Inlet. The team cautiously approached and followed the dolphins until they entered shallow water ideal for the



Crab pot float line and buoy are removed from the dolphin. The float line was tightly wrapped around both pectoral flippers.



Mother and calf just prior to release following disentanglement and veterinary evaluation.

intervention. The entangled dolphin and her calf were carefully encircled in a large net and dozens of trained responders entered the water to assist in capturing the pair. Once the dolphins were in hand, the rope and buoy were removed and the injuries were evaluated by veterinarians. Fortunately the female dolphin appeared to be in good health and was deemed suitable for immediate release. After collecting blood and administering antibiotics, a roto-tag was attached to the dolphin's fin to enable researchers to easily recognize her in the field and to follow her progress. The female/calf pair were released together and quickly swam away. We are hopeful that the mother will recover fully from the entanglement injuries and will continue to nurture her growing calf. Thank you and congratulations to all organizations and individuals involved in this remarkable rescue!

Entanglements can be life-threatening for Dolphins. Always Follow Dolphin Safe Fishing and Viewing Tips!

1. Never feed wild dolphins—it's harmful and illegal.
2. Reuse or share leftover bait.
3. Reel in your line if dolphins appear.
4. Change locations if dolphins show interest in bait or catch.
5. Release catch quietly away from dolphins when and where it is possible to do so without violating any state or federal fishing regulations.
6. Check gear and terminal tackle.
7. Use circle and corrodible hooks.
8. Stay at least 50 yards away from dolphins.
9. Prevent wildlife entanglements—recycle fishing line.
10. Stash your trash.

THANK YOU!



HSWRI Volunteer Highlight

The HSWRI Marine Mammal Stranding Team would like to recognize Lisa Gemma for her countless hours of hard work and dedication! Lisa graduated from the University of South Florida with a bachelor's degree in biology and a minor in geology in 2011 and began volunteering with HSWRI in 2012. Since then Lisa has assisted with numerous live and dead marine mammal strandings, and dozens of photo-ID surveys. She has tirelessly applied herself to the daunting task of entering photo-ID data, and organizing and cataloging thousands of dorsal fin photos. Her diligence with the photo-ID catalog has allowed her to easily recognize animals in the field and she has become an expert in both recognition and social affiliations for local bottlenose dolphins. Lisa's commitment to contribute to the conservation and understanding of local dolphin populations is extremely commendable and we are incredibly fortunate to have her on our team! Thank you Lisa for all that you do!



In January Lisa assisted with the rescue of a mother dolphin that had become entangled in a crab pot float line (story on page 2).

Stranding Summary

2013 was a record breaking year for the HSWRI Marine Mammal Stranding Team. In total, we responded to 132 strandings including 14 live animals and 118 dead animals. Ninety-one strandings occurred in Brevard County and 41 strandings occurred in Volusia County. In 2013, our program responded to:

- 126 bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) (114 dead, 12 live)
- 1 Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*) (live)
- 2 humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) (2 dead)
- 1 *Kogia sp* (pygmy or dwarf sperm whale) (dead)
- 1 false killer whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*) (live)
- 1 unknown cetacean species (dead)

2014 is proving to be a busy year as well. To date we have responded to 29 strandings including 2 live animal and 27 dead animals. Sixteen strandings occurred in Brevard County and 13 strandings occurred in Volusia County. To date in 2014, we have responded to:

- 27 bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) (25 dead, 2 live)
- 1 humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) (dead)
- 1 unknown dolphin species (dead)



What can you do to help a stranded whale or dolphin?



To report an injured or dead marine mammal, please call:
1-888-404-3922

- Please do not push the animal back into the water. Stranded animals are typically very sick, injured or orphaned and will beach themselves again.
- Keep people and pets away from the animal. Limit the number of people to the minimum needed to hold the animal upright. Petting stranded marine mammals should be avoided because it may cause stress to the animal.
- Keep the animal upright and relieve pressure from the flippers by digging pits under them in the sand.
- Keep the animal cool and wet by pouring water on the skin or applying wet towels and shading the animal (avoid getting water in or blocking the blowhole).
- Avoid the tail area and let go of the animal if it thrashes. Stranded whales and dolphins are wild animals and can be dangerous.



Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute Celebrates 50 Years of Sea Life Solutions



Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute (HSWRI) is a not-for-profit research organization established in 1963, by the founders of SeaWorld, Inc. in San Diego, California. For 50 years, the Institute's mission has been "to return to the sea some measure of the benefits derived from it." HSWRI has been involved with marine mammal strandings in Florida for decades and has been a participant in the Southeastern U.S. Stranding Network for over a decade. As a stranding network member, HSWRI responds to cetacean (whale and dolphin) strandings along the east coast of Florida including the intracoastal waterway and along the Atlantic Ocean beaches. Stranded animals provide an opportunity for HSWRI scientists to gather biological information and conduct valuable scientific research that is critical to our understanding of the health of coastal and ocean ecosystems in Florida. The team is also called upon to assist with manatee strandings and to assist with cetacean stranding events outside its primary area.



The coordinators of the HSWRI Marine Mammal Stranding Team: (from left to right) Assistant Research Scientist, Teresa Mazza and Research Scientists, Wendy Noke Durden and Megan Stolen.

We would like to acknowledge our friends and supporters as well as the hundreds of volunteers who have been invaluable since the inception of the research program in Florida. Our efforts would not be possible without your support! Thank you all so much!

Mid-Atlantic Unusual Mortality Event Leads to Increased Stranding Response

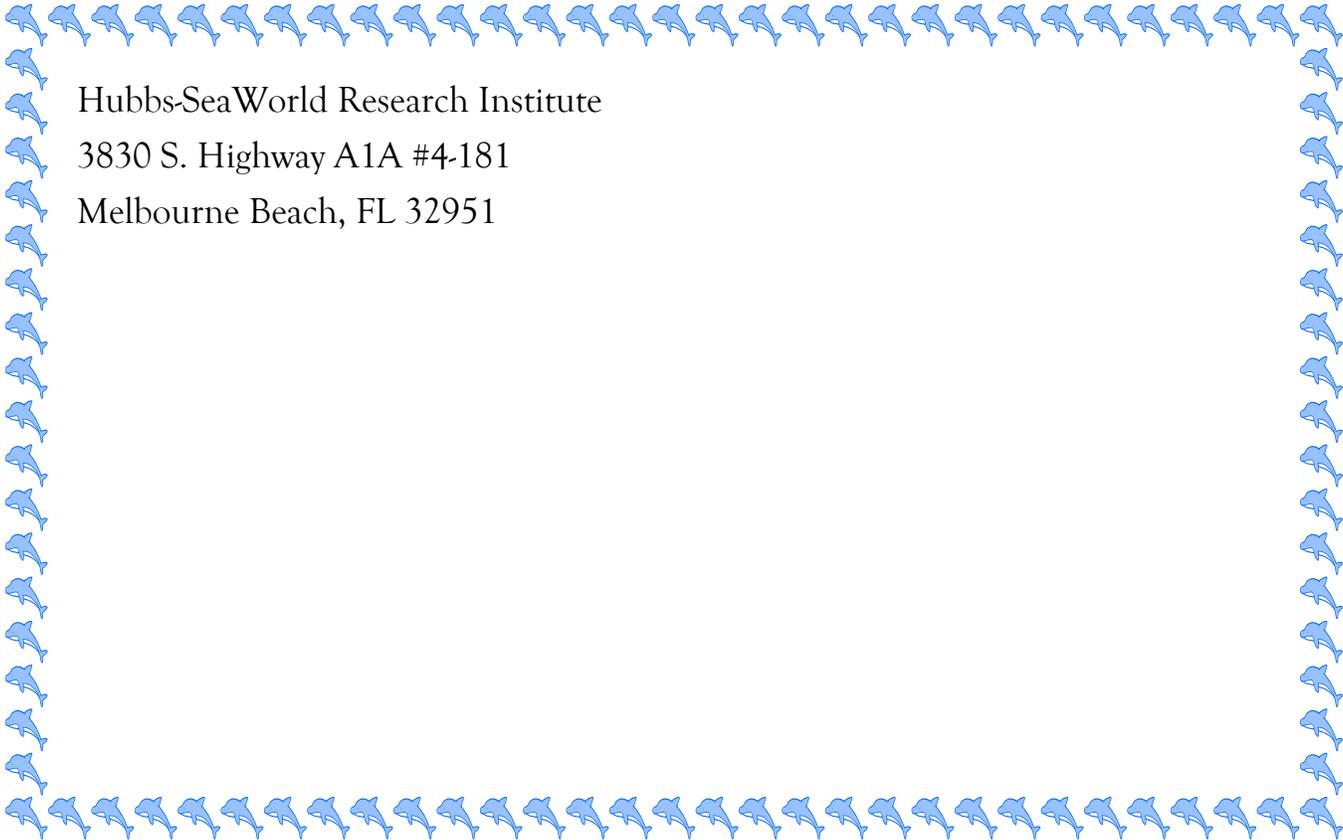
In July 2013, the northeast region of the Marine Mammal Stranding Network began experiencing elevated numbers of stranded animals. As weeks went on the increase in mortality spread further south and an Unusual Mortality Event (UME) was declared. The UME may be affecting several different coastal populations of bottlenose dolphins including the southern migratory coastal stock, the northern migratory coastal stock, the northern North Carolina estuarine stock, the Atlantic offshore stock, the South Carolina Georgia coastal stock, the northern Florida coastal stock and the Central Florida coastal stock, in addition to numerous estuarine populations that could be impacted. The findings and the results of viral testing to date indicate that the tentative cause of the Mid-Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphin UME, impacting dolphins from NY to FL, is cetacean morbillivirus, a contagious viral infection which has the ability to spread among whales and dolphins in close proximity. To date, more than 1100 dolphins have stranded in association with this event and the majority of dolphins tested were confirmed positive or suspect positive for morbillivirus.



An emaciated (skinny) stranded bottlenose dolphin in Volusia County. Note the visibility of the animal's ribs.

In November we began to see an increase in oceanside dolphin strandings in our area with consistent findings including emaciation, respiratory pathologies, neurological abnormalities (in live stranded dolphins) and ulcerated skin lesions. These findings are consistent with the morbillivirus event and the associated animals are considered part of the ongoing UME. To date we have responded to 48 dolphins in our stranding response area in association with the Mid-Atlantic UME and all dolphins tested in our area have been confirmed or suspect positive for morbillivirus. Monthly response to these animals has ranged between 7-18 animals. Nearly 200 dolphins have stranded along the north and central coasts of Florida since November and we continue to respond to elevated stranding numbers. We are fortunate that we have not had a confirmed case of morbillivirus in the Indian River Lagoon dolphin population which was subjected to a UME in 2013 (currently under investigation). The mid-Atlantic bottlenose dolphin UME has been of historic significance and has impacted more animals than any previously documented UME in the area. We are hopeful that our continued network-wide efforts will contribute to our understanding of the virus and will aid in the conservation of dolphin populations in the future.





Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute
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Melbourne Beach, FL 32951



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- Student \$10/year
- Explorer \$50/year
- Navigator \$250/year
- Individual/family \$20/year
- Researcher \$100/year
- Captain \$500/year

*All members will receive the HSWRI Marine Mammal newsletter, “Fins and Flukes,” each quarter.

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Please mail donation to:

Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute
Stranding Program
3830 S. Highway A1A #4-181
Melbourne Beach, FL 32951

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