ifaw

marine mammal rescue & research

25

number of years since MMRR's first response on Cape Cod as the Cape Cod Stranding Network.

6,870

number of total responses to stranded dolphins, whales, seals and other marine mammals to-date.

630+

dolphins rescued, and counting.

~700

miles (1127km) of coastline for which IFAW is the sole stranding response agency.

200+

specially-trained stranding response volunteers throughout Cape Cod.

1200

average number of calls the team fields per year.

▸ Our work continues through any challenge. The team works tirelessly to provide stranded dolphins with humane and often lifesaving care as they are relocated from shallow to deeper water off Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

Local action, global impact
Marine mammal strandings provide an opportunity to learn and affect the future welfare of individual animals, while contributing to the conservation of species and health of their ocean habitat. IFAW's Marine Mammal Rescue and Research (MMRR) program is a world-recognized leader in stranding response

Based on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, no location in the world sees more frequent mass strandings of dolphins. These events are not only a unique opportunity to rescue and provide cutting-edge veterinary care to these individual animals, but also drive constant innovation and groundbreaking research that is shared with collaborators from around the world.

Fueled by science
IFAW's expert staff and volunteers have responded to over 5,870 stranded marine mammals since 1998. In the early days of marine mammal rescue, most organizations in the world believed that releasing a single animal from a social species would result in certain death, and they were instead humanely euthanized in the interest of animal welfare.

Fueled by science, and using satellite tracking technology, our years of data proved that healthy individual stranded dolphins can reintegrate back into a pod and survive. And we championed a change in policy across the marine mammal rescue profession. Across the globe – from Iceland to India, from the UK to New Zealand – healthy stranded dolphins can return to life in the ocean. We still see each event as an opportunity to improve and continue to advance our rescue techniques, health assessments, diagnostic capabilities and treatment protocols.

The rush to save them
In addition to helping sick seals on the beaches of Cape Cod, MMRR has pioneered new techniques to help rescue gray seals entangled in fishing gear. Tight wraps of netting around their neck become deadly as the seals grow and the gear cuts deeper. A significant welfare and conservation concern, MMRR intervenes to remotely sedate these animals so that they can be captured, disentangled and treated before being released back to the wild. These are the first ever operations of their kind in seals, and have made a difference to every single animal that has benefited, mitigating negative human impacts on both the individual and the population.

Photo credit to Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Photo taken under NOAA Permit 18786-04

17+

countries have received training and expertise, including the UK, New Zealand, Belize, Iceland, Oman, India, Canada, Spain, Madagascar, Trinidad, Russia, Argentina, Peru, Australia, Brazil, Kenya and South Africa.

45

scientific publications led or contributed to worldwide, and counting.

▸ Georgia Department of Natural Resources vessel and crew obtaining assessment images of injured right whale calf on January 10. Photo by: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

All activities conducted under a federal stranding agreement between IFAW and NMFS under the US Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).

▸ see how at ifaw.org

#SaveTheStranded

Driven toward solution

In January of 2020, our Marine Mammal Rescue and Research team put years of preparations, equipment testing and deployment practice of the large whale remote drug delivery system to work. As part of a team convened by US National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), MMRR staff deployed to Florida, where the system was used to successfully administer antibiotics to an injured newborn right whale calf that had been the victim of a vessel strike. This was a groundbreaking event,
as it was the first operation to remotely administer medication to a right whale calf.

Not only is MMRR the only team in the world with the capabilities to provide medical intervention to free swimming large whales, but the team also maintains one of the most skilled necropsy teams in the US, and are frequently called upon by the US government to investigate the causes of death for stranded North Atlantic right whales – one of the most endangered animals in the world with fewer than 360 remaining. The species has faced devastating population loss in the last four years, due to entanglements and vessel strikes. Every individual whale matters more than ever.

The work being done by the MMRR program is a prime example of the impact of IFAW's fresh thinking and bold action, and how the efforts to rescue individuals affect populations.

People in action

In addition to our hands-on rescue and research work, IFAW's Marine Mammal Rescue team trains other response teams, improving the welfare, rescue techniques, and veterinary care provided to stranded marine mammals around the world. We engage and train passionate members of local communities to support rescue efforts as volunteer and professional responders. It's a testament to what can be achieved for animals when we work together with the people living closest to them.

Marine Mammal Rescue & Research highlights

- Industry-leading design of a purpose-built Mobile Dolphin Rescue Clinic
- Advanced field diagnostic tools, including ECG, x-ray and ultrasound are used to better evaluate health and prognosis of stranded marine mammals
- First stranding agency to demonstrate that healthy single stranded dolphins can survive postrelease
- First agency to prove that single stranded dolphins in good health can be released and rejoin conspecifics
- First successful remote sedation of an entangled (phocid) seal and in-water capture for disentanglement and treatment
- First remote treatment of a swimming, injured, endangered right whale calf.
- First rescued minke whale that was satellite tagged and released after stranding.