

Large Dolphin Strands in Ocean Springs

On the evening of Monday May 22, 2006 residents of St. Andrews, a neighborhood located in Ocean Springs, MS, spotted a very large dolphin in need of help. The residents tried to push the huge dolphin into deeper water several times, but he kept returning to the shore. It was at this time that they called the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Pascagoula office and the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) for assistance. NMFS called the Institute for Marine Mammal Studies (IMMS) to aid in the rescue, so we deployed our stranding team to the scene, which consists of our marine mammal stranding coordinator, marine mammal veterinarian, and other marine mammal experts.

When the team arrived, they discovered three people supporting a dolphin in knee deep water on the beach. The animal appeared to be a large, male Atlantic Bottlenose dolphin with multiple marks on its body, and was estimated to weigh between 500-600 lbs (actual weight later was 550lbs). Because of the ensuing darkness and condition of the dolphin, the stranding team decided it would be best to transport the dolphin to a temporary pool until its medical status could better be determined.



In order to move the dolphin, a specially designed stretcher was placed under the dolphin's body by IMMS stranding team members. The team then lifted the dolphin and carried him back to the IMMS rescue truck in the stretcher. Once in the truck, the dolphin was placed on foam mats to cushion its body and was transported to the IMMS temporary pool in Gulfport, MS.

Approximately an hour after the transport began, the dolphin was placed into a 3 ft. deep temporary pool. The dolphin could not support himself, so flotation devices were placed around the animal to help keep him in an upright position with his blowhole out of the water. (It is very important for a dolphin to be able to breathe properly, without water getting into its blowhole.) At this time, 24 hour monitoring was initiated by IMMS personnel.

Throughout the night the dolphin's health continued to deteriorate. The bloodwork came back abnormal and the next morning after a conference with NMFS officials and IMMS key personnel, it was decided that the dolphin should be humanely euthanized.

Unfortunately the animal's prognosis was very poor and ending his suffering was the best thing the IMMS stranding team could do for him. His body was transported immediately to Louisiana State University School of Veterinary Medicine in Baton Rouge, LA, for a complete necropsy (which is an animal autopsy). After the necropsy results were obtained, it was discovered that the dolphin was relatively old and suffering from a chronic illness.

Valuable information can be collected from the bodies of deceased stranded dolphins, which is why it is important to call the IMMS stranding hotline when you see a dead dolphin on the Mississippi shores. Should you see a dolphin or whale, whether deceased or alive and in distress, please call 1-888-SOS-DOLPHIN (1-888-767-3657) and leave your name, a contact phone number, and the location of the animal.