
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
COMMERCE
NEWS

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20230

NATIONAL
OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC
ADMINISTRATION

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NOAA05-005

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 13, 2005

**KINGFISHER THE ENTANGLED RIGHT WHALE RE-SIGHTED OFF THE
GEORGIA COAST**

Endangered Animal Survives Entanglement, Appears Healthy

Kingfisher, the young male endangered North Atlantic right whale that was partially disentangled from fishing gear by the NOAA rescue team last March, was spotted off Cumberland Island, Ga. on Tuesday. NOAA team members and the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies closely photographed the whale and assessed the entanglement nine months after the team lost track of it. NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

"This whale is in much better condition than we had anticipated," said Dr. Charles "Stormy" Mayo, Senior Scientist and Director of Whale Rescue at PCCS. "Most of the entangling rope has come off the whale during the past year."

In March 2004, the NOAA team removed some rope and gear from Kingfisher as he traveled along the coasts of Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas. The whale's story captivated many people as he struggled to free himself from the numerous lines and buoys attached to his body. The poor weather conditions and the movement of the whale prevented the team from removing all of the ropes.

According to scientists, it is not uncommon for whales to shed some of the gear over time. But it is surprising in this particular case considering the complexity of his original entanglement.

"We are extremely pleased that this whale has survived being entangled for this length of time," said Dr. Teri Rowles, NOAA Fisheries lead veterinarian and head of the Marine Mammal Stranding and Response Program. "We plan to monitor Kingfisher, but at this point the entanglement does not appear to be life threatening."

Scientists lost track of Kingfisher on April 3, 2004 when a fisherman accidentally cut through the line carrying a satellite tag, which tracked Kingfisher's movements, halting further disentangling attempts. Many feared he was dead, since the

entanglement was so severe.

But on January 11, 2005, a New England Aquarium aerial team studying right whale winter habitat sighted the whale about 15 miles east of Cumberland Island with a large, loose tangle of line on the right flipper, and a short trailing line extending to his flukes.

Using photographic identification from its extensive database on right whales, Aquarium biologists quickly knew it was Kingfisher – named in honor of the U.S. Coast Guard vessel that assisted in last spring's disentanglement effort. Kingfisher is formally known as right whale #3346, according to New England Aquarium records. He was born in 2003.

"All of us are exceedingly gratified that Kingfisher is not only alive but appears healthy," adds Dr. Mayo.

The North Atlantic right whale is one of the most endangered off American coasts. For nearly four centuries, North Atlantic right whales were hunted. The greatest population decline appears to have occurred in the early 18th Century. In 1935, when international protection for these whales came into effect, there may have been as few as 100 animals in the population.

Although whaling practices have ceased, right whales face serious risks from ship collisions and entanglements in fishing gear and marine debris. According to NOAA, the North Atlantic right whale population is now estimated to be approximately 300 animals and is listed as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973. Right whales and all other species of marine mammals are also protected under the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

Since 1976 the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies has conducted scientific research on marine conservation, and in 1984, pioneered whale disentanglement techniques from its Cape Cod headquarters.

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On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

PCCS: www.coastalstudies.org

Media – Photographs can be downloaded from:

<http://coastalstudies.org/what-we-do/whale-rescue/kingfisher.htm>

