

## Pygmy sperm whale strands on Daytona Beach



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DAYTONA BEACH — A pygmy sperm whale, possibly suffering from heart disease, stranded itself on the beach just as the sun came up Friday morning.

The whale was almost 10 feet long, said Wendy Noke, a marine mammal biologist with [Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute](#).

Pygmy sperm whales live in tropical and temperate latitudes throughout the world's oceans. They reach lengths up to 11.5 feet and weigh up to 1,000 pounds.

They live up to 23 years, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and have a characteristic known as the "squid tactic" that allows them to eject more than 3 gallons of dark, reddish brown liquid when they feel threatened or when trying to evade predators. They are rarely sighted.

Beach goers found the whale early Friday morning, said Capt. Andrew Ethridge with Volusia County Beach Safety and Ocean Rescue. The county's marine mammal stranding network and the Marine Discovery Center responded to the location near the 2500 block of North Atlantic Avenue to assist.

Bystanders were amazed by the whale's powerful looking teeth.

Pygmy sperm whales only have teeth in their lower jaws, Noke said. “They feed on squid, so the teeth aren’t really for chewing, they’re more for grasping.”

The whale was packed with ice to preserve its internal organs and taken to the Discovery Center so the Hubbs-SeaWorld biologists could conduct a necropsy and try to determine why the whale died.

The only external thing they noticed was the whale seemed to have quite a load of parasites, said Noke. “And, it appeared to have indicators of heart disease, a common cause of death in pygmy sperm whales,” she said.

Noke said it appeared the whale stranded itself on the beach and then died.

“We were able to get numerous samples for further testing that will hopefully allow us to determine the cause of death,” she said.

“It appeared normal,” she said. “It was in pretty good shape. It had been eating recently and its stomach was full.”