

Endangered whales exit Sebastian Inlet after a few days there

[Jim Waymer](#), FLORIDA TODAY 5 p.m. EST February 9, 2016

An endangered North Atlantic right whale and her calf lingered for a second day in Sebastian Inlet on Tuesday, then swam back out into the ocean.

"In my 17 years of doing this, I have not seen them doing this inside of Sebastian Inlet," Julie Albert, who runs a whale monitoring network for the nonprofit Marine Resources Council, said on Monday.

On Tuesday morning (Feb. 9), the two whales were still inside the inlet, near the mouth of Indian River Lagoon. But by the afternoon, they had returned to sea. No one's quite sure which way they're heading.

The mother whale is about 45 feet and its calf about 18 feet. They've been swimming back and forth as onlookers snap photos.

By boat, officers with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission kept oncoming boats from getting too close to the endangered whales.

People must stay at least 500 yards from right whales, or risk fines.

The right whale calving season begins in mid-November and runs through mid-April. Whales swim down the Atlantic coast to give birth to their calves.

Every winter pregnant right whales swim more than 1,000 miles from their feeding grounds off Canada and New England to waters of South Carolina, Georgia and northeastern Florida.

Right whales are dark with no dorsal fin and often swim slowly at or just below the water's surface.

Right whales are protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. To lessen risk of collisions between the whales and boats, federal law requires vessels 65 feet long and greater to slow to 10 knots or less in Seasonal Management Areas along the U.S. Eastern Seaboard. That includes the calving and nursery area in the southeastern U.S.

"It's very unusual that they would come into an inlet," Lenny Salberg, a spokesman for FWC, said Monday of the whales, adding that state biologists have assured it's not because the whales are sick. "These are very healthy whales." Biologists refer to the female whale as "Clipper," because of her fins is clipped.

Story continues below video:



An endangered North Atlantic right whale and her calf swam into Sebastian Inlet today

Scientists from Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute and Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution also monitored the situation.

"We're trying to keep the area quiet," said Albert by cellphone, from aboard the FWC boat.

"We intend to stay with them until they go back out."

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