

# INDIAN RIVER COUNTY

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## Mother whale, calf leave lagoon, head north of Sebastian Inlet | Video, photos



By Elliott Jones of TCPalm

Updated: 3:37 p.m.

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PHOTOS

### Sebastian Inlet webcam

### Photo gallery

SEBASTIAN — Mother whale "Clipper" and her calf remained around the Sebastian Inlet this morning, but are now in the ocean heading north.

While visiting the inlet, they attracted many visitors to Sebastian



A right whale (center) and its calf (left) are seen swimming west of the Sebastian Inlet in the Indian River Lagoon Monday as dozens of onlookers watch from the shoreline. (ERIC HASERT/TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS)

TOP



**Photo gallery: Mother, calf right whales around Sebastian Inlet**

Inlet State Park, park ranger Kevin Husty said.

The two North Atlantic right whales showed up Monday, surprising wildlife officials because whales normally stay miles out in the ocean. Mother whales migrate to Florida's offshore waters during

winter to give birth.

Hubbs SeaWorld Research Institute in Melbourne Beach had staff counting Clipper's respiration before she left the inlet. It was normal, although the whale appeared tired, officials said. She attempted 16 times to cross under State Road A1A to the ocean before succeeding.

By 2 p.m. the pair was north of the inlet, said Leonard Salberg, spokesman for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, who was at the inlet watching them.

Because of the whales, the inlet is closed to boaters, except for emergencies, said Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission spokesman Lenny Salberg. Federal law mandates a 500-yard buffer zone around the whales. Boaters are asked to use other inlets. Boating conditions in the inlet today are especially rough because of the winds and tides, he said.

A Fish and Wildlife Commission airplane is flying overhead at times to track the whales.

The mother whale is about 45 feet long and the calf is 20 feet long.

About 500 people were at the inlet Monday to watch the whales.

"It was absolutely incredible," said Vero Beach resident, Celeste McWilliams, who went to the park Monday with her daughter, Cori, 12, and husband, Mike. For four hours, they endured the wind and cold to see all they could of the rare creatures during an unprecedented appearance of right whales in the inlet.

Her daughter kept "yelling at me to take pictures," she said.

"They are so massive. The calf stayed next to the mother, who spouted water as she breathed through her blow hole."

In the inlet, the two whales are so close they can be seen by people on land. Early this morning, they were west of the bridge that passes over the inlet going into Brevard County.

The park is open 24 hours a day and the cost of admission is \$4 for one person or \$8 for a vehicle with up to eight people, the ranger said.

### **BEST VIEWS**

Those who got the best look at the whales parked on the south side and walked along the inlet's shore.

Trying to watch the whales from the bridge wasn't advised. The bridge's pedestrian walkway is only one foot wide and close to traffic.

Having the whales so close to shore is very unusual, said Grant Gilmore, a marine scientist. The last time that occurred in Indian River County was in the 1980s, when a mother and calf were spotted off Vero Beach's South Beach Park for two days, he said. "She was nursing the calf" as surfers paddled around, he said. "It was just amazing."

### **LEARN MORE ABOUT 'CLIPPER'**

Clipper is among the thousands of North Atlantic right whales that are in the North Atlantic Right Whale Catalog maintained by the New England Aquarium. Visit <http://rwcatalog.neaq.org/>, choose "Search for individual whales," and then choose 3450 in the "Catalog No." dropdown.