



**HUBBS  
SEAWORLD  
RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE**

# FINS & FLUKES

MARINE MAMMAL STRANDING PROGRAM

**SPRING 2018**

## STRANDING SUMMARY

In 2017, the HSWRI Marine Mammal Stranding Program responded to 45 stranded cetaceans including 11 live animals and 34 dead animals. Twenty-seven strandings occurred in Brevard County and 18 strandings occurred in Volusia County.

- 37 bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*), 30 of those from the Indian River Lagoon
- 2 pygmy sperm whales (*Kogia breviceps*), 2 dwarf sperm whales (*Kogia sima*), 1 unknown Kogia
- 1 Cuvier's beaked whale (*Ziphius cavirostris*)
- 1 spinner dolphin (image 1.1) (*Stenella longirostris*)
- 1 unidentified dolphin species



Image 1.1 - Stranded Spinner dolphin

## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP A STRANDED WHALE OR DOLPHIN?

TO REPORT AN INJURED OR DEAD MARINE MAMMAL, PLEASE CALL:

**1 (888) 404-3922**

1. Please do not push the animal back into the water. Stranded animals are typically very sick, injured, or orphaned and will beach themselves again.
2. Keep people and pets away from the animal. Limit the number of people to the minimum needed to hold the animal upright. Petting stranded marine mammals should be avoided because it may cause stress to the animal.
3. Keep the animal upright and relieve pressure from the flippers by digging pits under them in the sand.
4. Keep the animal cool and wet by pouring water on the skin or applying wet towels and shading the animal (avoid getting water in or blocking the blowhole).
5. Avoid the tail area and let go of the animal if it thrashes. Stranded whales and dolphins can be dangerous.

**RESPONDED TO**

**1196**

**DOLPHIN AND WHALE  
STRANDINGS\***

\*2001-2017

# MULTIPLE DOLPHIN RESCUES ON THE INDIAN RIVER LAGOON

The Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute's Marine Mammal Stranding Program was particularly busy in 2017 with an increase in dolphin entanglements in the Indian River Lagoon. We responded to four dolphin calves that have become entangled in various types of fishing gear and debris.

On January 17th, 2017, the first calf, nick-named, "June" (image 1.2), was disentangled from a large amount of fishing line that had become wrapped around and embedded in the dolphin's flukes. A radio-transmitter was applied to June's mother, to allow post-release monitoring. Unfortunately, less than a month later, we responded to a dolphin calf, nick-named, "Kai" (image 1.3), that was observed with unknown debris bridled through its mouth. The calf appeared to have trouble swimming and was consistently listing to the left side. On the day of Kai's rescue, February 14th, a Hawaiian pole spear was found trailing along the calf's left side, with the rubber sling wrapped around its jaw and left flipper.

In March 2017, we began receiving reports of a young dolphin with a rope wrapped around its body. After extensive search efforts, we were able to locate the animal and an intervention took place on May 10th.



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1.3 - This dolphin calf was found to have the sling of a Hawaiian pole spear bridled through its mouth.

The dolphin calf, nick-named "Houdini" (images 1.4-1.6), had a length of rope draped through its mouth, over its peduncle (tail-region), and trailing behind the flukes. In addition, a section of monofilament fishing line was found deeply embedded in the left flipper. In November, during a photo-ID survey we spotted a mother dolphin, nick-named "Seabiscuit", and her calf. Unfortunately, the calf was observed with some sort of debris tightly encircling its head. Again, we were able to coordinate a rescue with help from NOAA Fisheries on December 11th.



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1.4 and 1.5 - A calf nicknamed "Houdini" was sighted with a rope draped through its mouth and across its body



1.2 - A calf nicknamed "June" was disentangled from fishing line on January 17th 2017



1.6 - "Houdini" was disentangled on May 10th 2017



## DOLPHIN RESCUES (CONTINUED)

We are happy to report that all four dolphin calves were successfully disentangled and safely returned back to the lagoon with their mothers. Two of these entanglements occurred in the Banana River and two occurred in the Mosquito Lagoon. We would like to express our appreciation to local residents who, by reporting these sightings, were instrumental in their rescue. We would also like to thank our HSWRI volunteers and our partner organizations in the stranding network who made these interventions possible, including: SeaWorld Orlando, NOAA Fisheries, Georgia Aquarium Dolphin Conservation Field Station, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute, Clearwater Marine Aquarium, the University of Florida, Volusia County Environmental Management and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.



1.7



1.8

## PLACARDS



1.9



1.10 - 1.11 - HSWRI's scientists placing placards at parks and docks along the Indian River Lagoon

Over the past year and a half, there have been 8 cases of free-swimming dolphins becoming entangled in gear in the Indian River Lagoon. Of these cases, 6 were successfully disentangled and released, one became entangled two different times, and one is known to have died from entanglement. In addition, seven dead dolphins were found to have ingested fishing gear. To address this growing problem, our Marine Mammal Stranding Program, in coordination with NOAA Fisheries, installed new educational placards at piers, docks, sea walls and boat ramps along the Indian River Lagoon (images 1.9 - 1.11). The hope is that people seeing the placards will refrain from feeding wild dolphins and safely recycle their fishing line. You can also help by reeling in your line if dolphins are near, releasing your catch quietly away from dolphins, and by remaining at least 50 yards away. Visit [DontFeedWildDolphins.org](http://DontFeedWildDolphins.org) for more information.

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

## WINTER & HOPE UPDATE

In December 2005, Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute’s marine mammal stranding team responded to an entangled bottlenose dolphin calf who would later become one of the world’s most famous dolphins. The young calf had become badly entangled in a crab pot float line and was discovered by a local fisherman in the Mosquito Lagoon. Biologists went to the site and supported the animal in the water until the transport and veterinary team arrived. The calf, later named “Winter” (images 1.12 - 1.13), was transported by SeaWorld’s animal care team to Clearwater Marine Aquarium where she received life-saving rehabilitative care. Winter survived her injuries, but unfortunately, due to prolonged lack of blood-flow, her tail was lost. Her story of survival inspired the movie, “Dolphin Tale.”

Five years later, HSWRI’s stranding team responded to a report of an orphaned dolphin calf. The mother was found deceased in sea grass flats in the Indian River Lagoon.

The calf was carefully encircled in a net and transported to Clearwater Marine Aquarium. The calf, named “Hope” (images 1.14 - 1.15), was raised at the aquarium and soon became a companion for Winter.

We are excited to share that both dolphins continue to thrive at Clearwater Marine Aquarium. Because they were so young at the time of their rescue, they did not have the opportunity to learn the skills they would need to survive in the wild and would have to depend on humans to care for them. Winter and Hope recently celebrated their birthdays. Hope is now 7 years old and Winter is 12 years old. Hope is nearly 300lbs and is very active, splashing and playing with enrichment puzzles the team puts together for her. Winter is around 270lbs and enjoys relaxing on her floating mat and playing with a giant Kong toy. Winter and Hope continue to inspire millions around the world with their rescue stories. We are pleased to have played a role in their amazing success.



1.12 - Winter post rescue



1.13 - HSWRI Scientist Teresa Jablonski at Winter’s Rescue



1.14 - Winter (left) and Hope (right) thriving at their new rehabilitation home, Clearwater Marine Aquarium



1.15 - Winter (top) and Hope (bottom) enjoying a “second chance at life”

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

## RODEO UPDATE

In 2013, the Indian River Lagoon dolphin population experienced an Unusual Mortality Event (UME). In June of that year, we responded to an adult male dolphin that was found sunburned and stranded in sea grass in the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. Fortunately, the dolphin was strong enough to be removed from the scene and transported to SeaWorld Orlando. For the next 5 months, the dolphin, nick-named “Rodeo” (images 1.16 - 1.17), received around-the-clock care from experienced SeaWorld animal care staff and veterinarians until he was healthy enough to be returned to the lagoon. A radio-transmitter was attached to his dorsal fin to allow HSWRI to locate him and follow his progress in the months that followed



1.17 - Rodeo stranded in 2013



1.18 - HSWRI Scientist Megan Stolen and Rodeo in 2017



1.16 - HSWRI Scientist Teresa Jablonski during Rodeo’s rescue in 2013

his release. We were happy to see that he was able to forage successfully and had reintegrated into the population. As years passed, Rodeo was occasionally sighted during routine photo-ID surveys within the lagoon and appeared to be doing well. On July 25th 2017, we received a call from a concerned fisherman who observed a dolphin in shallow water, barely moving. We went to the scene and identified the dolphin using the unique markings on its dorsal fin; it was Rodeo (image 1.18). He was thin and looked to be slightly sunburned. We watched as he gained some strength and slowly moved into deeper water. We are unsure of Rodeo’s welfare post-response but are hopeful he recovered and survived the stranding.



# FINS & FLUKES

## SUPPORTERS

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## OUR VISION

*Our long-term impact  
 Working together to steward a  
 healthier planet where humans  
 and marine life thrive together.*

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\* Donor is deceased.

### OUR PURPOSE

*Why we exist  
 To conserve and renew  
 marine life to ensure a  
 healthier planet.*

This list is comprised of donors who supported HSWRI's Florida Team from February 2017 to February 2018. Though we take every possible step to ensure its accuracy, with a list of this nature it is possible that an oversight has occurred. If your name has been omitted or there is an error in the listing, we apologize and ask that you contact us at 619-226-3871.



# FINS & FLUKES

## CHRISTINE LANCE, LAGOON SOLUTIONS

### HOME FUNDRAISER

In December 2017, conservation supporter Christine Lance graciously hosted a fundraising event at her beautiful home on the Indian River Lagoon (IRL) to benefit HSWRI and our research to promote practical and responsive lagoon solutions. Brevard community supporters and IRL residents passionate about the welfare of our local waterways and precious marine creatures joined HSWRI staff and volunteers.

President/CEO Don Kent gave a brief historical perspective on HSWRI, our Florida marine mammal stranding program and research mission. He also recognized the Mellon Foundation's role in helping establish our Florida Coconut Point lab in Melbourne Beach and the ongoing support from our founding partner, SeaWorld Parks and Entertainment. Don shared his vision for practical applications of our decades-long research alongside Brevard County's efforts to remediate the degradation of the IRL and expressed gratitude to event attendees for their generosity toward this specific fundraising effort to enhance the future welfare of precious marine life.

HSWRI research scientist Dr. Sam Rossman presented his findings that while the IRL continues to be heavily impacted by nutrient pollution, HSWRI's dolphin teeth collection has revealed significant improvements to the ecology of the IRL since the early 90s. He further described how his and the research team's work will serve as baseline targets for current remediation efforts and may help pinpoint areas of critical concern for nutrient pollution in the IRL to inform ongoing local resource management.

IRL National Estuary Program Director (IRLNEP), Dr. Duane DeFreese, recognized HSWRI's ability to work alongside the IRLNEP Council and other local conservation collaborators in our joint efforts to restore the lagoon stating that the ½ cent Brevard County tax is a national model of what can be done when residents band together to ensure significant impact on the resources they care most about. He urged attendees to realize the importance of private philanthropy to the success of our collective efforts and encouraged all in attendance to give, get involved in lagoon solutions and invite others to participate.



1.19 - (Pictured left to right) Don Kent, Susie Wasdin, Rashmi Shah, Christine Lance, Ambika Palaniyandi, Pamela Yochem



1.20 - HSWRI staff and volunteers



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All supporters will receive our Marine Mammal Stranding Program "Fins & Flukes" newsletter and be invited to an annual Coconut Point lab recognition event. Society members will be invited to special HSWRI events including a recognition event at SeaWorld Orlando. Donations may also be made online at [hswri.org/donate-now/](http://hswri.org/donate-now/) or by credit card at 619-226-3871.

