

## Rescuers free dolphin from seagrass bed at Merritt Island Refuge

Biologists hope mammal will recover

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SeaWorld Orlando staff rescued an adult male bottlenose dolphin Thursday, stranded in shallow water at the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge.

The sunburned dolphin weighed about 350 pounds and measured eight feet long.

A kayaker discovered the dolphin stuck in a thick bed of seagrass and reported it. SeaWorld Orlando staff ventured out on kayaks of their own to save the marine mammal. They found the dolphin at about 4 p.m., with the telltale wrinkled skin of severe sun exposure. They covered it in a white sheet to keep the dolphin cool.



Dolphin rescued off Merritt Island: SeaWorld rescue dolphin off Merritt Island. Video SeaWorld. Posted June 14, 2013.

"The top half of its body was out of the water. It was stranded and getting sunburned," said Teresa Mazza, research assistant with Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute in Melbourne Beach. "We don't suspect that he ended up in the shallow water by accident. He was sick, and we're not really sure what's wrong with him ... He did have pretty serious sunburn on his back."

SeaWorld Orlando's Animal Rescue team also responded to the scene. Rescuers transported the dolphin to SeaWorld's marine mammal medical facility in Orlando. The dolphin is currently in stable condition and eating, SeaWorld officials said. "They're cautiously optimistic," Mazza said.

Since Jan. 1, SeaWorld has responded to 47 stranded dolphins in the Indian River Lagoon, about twice the usual rate. Thursday's was the first live animal so far. Most have been emaciated, and federal wildlife officials are investigating the mysterious deaths.

"He didn't look like he was in bad condition," Mazza said of Thursday's stranded dolphin, which she said did not seem very emaciated.

"Right now, we haven't found anything to link them together," Mazza said of this year's dolphin deaths in the lagoon. "We've had six animals in the last six days."

### Want to help?

- To support Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute's dolphin research in Brevard County, you can buy the "Discover Florida's Oceans" license tag here: [www.discoverfloridasoceans.com](http://www.discoverfloridasoceans.com)
- To donate to Hubbs' marine mammal stranding program, visit [www.hswri.org](http://www.hswri.org). Make sure to note "Marine Mammal Stranding" on the donation.

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