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Pygmy sperm whale beaches itself on Melbourne Beach



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BREVARD COUNTY, Fla. — Eyewitness News was there as members of the Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute tried to rescue a pygmy sperm whale that beached itself on Melbourne Beach on Monday.

Visitors helped carry the 700 lb. pygmy whale to a beach access point so it could be taken to a laboratory.

"I saw them carrying something in the harness so I thought I'd come up and see what it was. I thought it was a turtle," visitor Paul Piso said.

Rescuers said the whale, which was severely malnourished, didn't make it and had to be euthanized.

Photos: Pygmy whale beaches itself

"It was difficult, but at the same time, it's better to get him out of his misery than to be in pain a lot," visitor Riley Shortt said.

A pygmy whale's healthy weight is around 1,200 lbs., researchers said.

"We have some concerns just because we've had a viral epidemic in this area. But my main concern for this whale is cardiac disease. Most of the whales of this species die of cardiac disease," said Megan Stolen, with Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute.

Stolen said the 10-foot whale showed signs of heart disease, and had rope and remnants of a plastic bag in its stomach. She said it will take longer to test for the morbillivirus. The measles-like virus has killed many dolphins, with the last confirmed central Florida case in February.

The group also recently responded for a beached dolphin, beached pilot whale and a beached melon-headed whale.

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