

On Friday 02 February BDMLR was alerted to a common dolphin swimming in circles in an intertidal muddy creek near Carnon Downs, Cornwall. Medics responding were transported to the site via National Trust 4x4 vehicles as the location was quite a distance and tricky to access, especially with a lot of kit.

On arrival a single dolphin was spotted already stranded out in the mud with the tide a far way out. Unfortunately the mud was too deep to reach the dolphin and further assistance was called upon to help access it safely with a tandem paddle board technique that we have successfully used before. While waiting, a limited amount of assessment could be done from a distance. The dolphin appeared to be in fairly good condition and the breathing rate was elevated at around 8 breaths per minute.

The team was then alerted to a second dolphin a long way down the creek on the opposite bank. This was investigated and sadly an adult female was found freshly deceased. She appeared to be in moderate body condition but there were no obvious health issues visually. The dolphin was photographed and recorded for our colleagues at Cornwall Marine Strandings Network.

Once the live dolphin had been successfully recovered to a safe area on the creekside a full assessment could be carried out. It was 1.4m, which is around the weaning length for this species. There were no significant issues found except for a high breathing rate and crackle in the lung noise. First aid was administered for some time to help it calm down. Based on the assessment and likelihood the animal would be able to cope independently of its deceased presumed mother, it was decided to trial a refloat. The dolphin was numbered with a livestock marker for future identification.

It was clear the animal could not be refloated in its current location on the incoming tide that was still hours away, and of course with it being well outside its normal habitat. It appeared the stranding may have occurred due to the pair getting lost in the labyrinth of creeks in the estuary. Therefore, the dolphin, kit and team were recovered by the National Trust vehicles back to the main road, where it was transferred into a car with our vet alongside monitoring throughout the journey to the coast and open sea.

It was dark when the team arrived at the release site in Falmouth. They donned drysuits and lifejackets, and armed with various torches and spotlights took the dolphin into the flat calm sea. The breathing rate was still high, but calmed down after a while, as well as gradually becoming more active and vocal. Medics slowly reduced support to see how it responded. At first it didn't do much, but after a few moments it suddenly sprang to life and dashed out to sea. The beach and surrounds were searched by torchlight but it was not seen again.

For now, we have guarded optimism that this has been a successful refloat, pending any further news over the coming days. In the meantime a huge thank you to all Medics that attended or were otherwise involved behind the scenes in some way, as well as the National Trust staff at Trelissick Gardens, Cornwall Wildlife Trust and the Marine Strandings Network for their invaluable support.