

Striped dolphin stranding at Praa Sands, Cornwall.

On Saturday 17 February just after 4pm, the British Divers Marine Life Rescue hotline was contacted to report a stranded dolphin at Praa Sands, Cornwall. Members of the public were attempting to refloat it despite dangerously rough surf and poor weather conditions. Penzance Coastguard Rescue Team were dispatched for human safety supervision, while BDMLR volunteer Marine Mammal Medics were summoned to respond.

On arrival the first Medics were able to take control and recovered the dolphin, which was being washed up the beach by the waves, safely above the water line so it could be stabilised and assessed. It was found to be a striped dolphin, which is infrequently recorded in the UK as it is a warmer-water species usually found in the Bay of Biscay. Many stranded striped dolphins in the UK have been found in poor nutritional condition with underlying health issues, so typically have to be put to sleep on that basis, however on this occasion the dolphin was assessed to be in moderate condition, making it a possible candidate to be refloated.

Further assessment showed minor injuries caused by stranding plus some old wounds, and it was recorded as a male measuring two metres long. It was evidently very stressed with a breathing rate reaching as high as 14 breaths per minute, which was eventually decreased due to the first aid being provided. Attending veterinarians agreed that a refloat attempt would be possible, however it was not safe to do this at the current site. On discussion with the Coastguard it was decided it would be transported to Carbis Bay, where it would be more sheltered and safer for the team to give the dolphin its best chance of getting back out.

The dolphin travelled well with a Medic alongside to monitor its condition and continue first aid. It was dark when the team reconvened at the release site, where it was re-stabilised and taken back into the sea on a tarpaulin. It was kept under control for a considerable period of time to allow it to recover properly, and as it appeared to get stronger and the breathing rate came down, it was released. From here it spent some time swimming erratically parallel to the shore, coming closer in occasionally but then eventually moved further out beyond the range of the torches. The team searched along the beach but there were no further sightings, so everyone stood down.

The following morning, Medics were already out searching the area when a call came in of a dolphin in the surf at Hayle, so a team was deployed with a veterinarian again. On arrival a couple of surfers were doing a good job of managing it correctly, and with their help it was brought ashore for reassessment. At this point it was clear from its behaviour in the water that its health had declined, and the breathing rate remained erratic despite first aid. Due to these factors and concern about other underlying health issues, it was decided euthanasia would be the best option for its welfare as it's prognosis had considerably deteriorated and it would likely continue to restrand and suffer. Following an efficient and painless procedure, it was taken for post mortem examination with Cornwall Marine Pathology Team, where a lot of useful feedback can be provided from their findings to tell us more about this dolphin's life.

We would like to thank all our team that attended this incident, along with Penzance Coastguard Rescue Team, members of the public, Cornwall Marine Pathology Team and the Carbis Bay Hotel for their hospitality.

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For further information please contact Dan Jarvis (BDMLR) on 07810 460603 or dan@bdmlr.org.uk

British Divers Marine Life Rescue is an international marine animal rescue organisation based in the UK and is a registered charity. The aims of the organisation are to provide a rescue service for marine wildlife, to support existing rehabilitation centres and to develop new methods of rescue, treatment, transport and care. Website www.bdmlr.org.uk.