

LLANDUDNO ENTANGLEMENT



Graphic images of injuries contained below.



Dear all,

The following is a professional courtesy update regarding the discovery of the deceased entangled female grey seal who had been primarily sighted around the Llandudno and Eastern Ynys Mon areas of North Wales the past few years.

On Sunday 8th December 2024, North Wales Seal Research Organisation (NWSRO) were notified of the appearance of a deceased seal with a severe neck entanglement washed up at the foot of the Great Orme in Llandudno following storm Darragh in which the Welsh coast was hit severely. The following day, pictures were obtained thanks to the valuable help of volunteer Julia Tucker. Although NWSRO logs deceased individuals in order to help establish a baseline data set of mortality rates in Wales as part of their research, we collaboratively share this data directly with Mat Westfield of Marine Environmental Monitoring (MEM) as deceased marine mammals fall under the MEM remit.

Deceased individuals are then assessed on a case-by-case basis by MEM as to whether they are suitable for collection for post mortem investigation and further sampling. Marine mammals are indicators of ocean health and evidence of any changes in the environment is often contained within their body as well as signs of the cause of death. Unfortunately, the storm left parts of Wales without power for a substantial amount of time including the MEM control. This collaborative work relies on open communication channels to arrange logistics of collection and storage so in light of this, it has led to back logs and delays in this important work. As I'm sure you can appreciate, there have been a high volume of specimens washing ashore following the storm and a large workload for MEM to deal with. With the help of Julia, NWSRO were able to attend the body to measure, photograph and record the injuries on behalf of MEM as well as retrieve the entangled object to avoid any further risk to marine life (object obtained as evidence and educational resource). From what we can tell, the object appears to be the end cap of a large PVC pipe of some sort. Once on scene it became clear that owed to the remote location and difficult terrain it would be logistically very difficult to retrieve the seal and we were unable to obtain the body on behalf of MEM.

Upon searching our database and with the help of Anna Griffiths of Morloi Conwy Volunteer Group we have ascertained that the seal was first sighted in early 2020 with the entanglement already in place and was last sighted this year (around April on Ynys Mon for NWSRO but I'm sure sighted since by your volunteers in the usual area of Llandudno). In 2021, Gem (NWSRO Director and BDMLR North Wales Coordinator) sought consultation with Dan Jarvis, Director of Welfare for British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) to establish a background on similar cases and understand what circumstances are



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required for rescue attempts. Consultation was also sought with local climbing experts for advice on accessing Llandudno's difficult terrain. Dan's wealth of knowledge was valuable in agreeing when a rescue attempt could take place and what equipment we would need and most of this has been acquired on standby since. It was hoped that the seal would haul out in a safer and more accessible area of coast before the entanglement became too severe. Unfortunately, these circumstances never aligned. BDMLR must put safety of the team first in all rescue scenarios so the terrain was the first primary hurdle with the addition of this being a 200kg + adult seal which would not easily be restrained. This therefore is considered a very large rescue and would require a multidisciplinary approach from veterinary professionals, advanced BDMLR medics, logistics experts and coastguard authorities as well as of course BDMLR head office. In addition, and contrary to some glorified amateur social media videos, entanglements this severe cannot simply be removed *in situ* and often require surgical intervention to treat the extensive wounds and avoid further complications from infection as well as pain management. Pinniped veterinary care for entanglement injuries this extensive is again, in its infancy although great strides have been made in recent years with the increasing number of entanglement cases. In Wales, a lack of specialist rehabilitation facilities means that this care is not easily available and results in a transport and logistics issue.

As I'm sure you can appreciate, this has been an incredibly traumatic experience for all volunteers involved over the past few years who have felt helpless watching this animal suffer from the cliffs. Although not the outcome that any of us ever wished for, the monitoring period has been extensive and the success of this is owed to volunteers such as Anna Griffiths and the Morloi Conwy team, the NWSRO volunteers, citizen science reporters like Julia Tucker, in addition to consultations from Dan Jarvis of BDMLR, Mat Westfield of MEM, and information from Adge Lane. Effective conservation monitoring rely on collaboration and successful relationships with our wildlife and their welfare at the forefront of our decision making. We would like to thank everyone involved and should any one wish to reach out to discuss further or ask questions please do not hesitate to contact me directly. Thank you all for your amazing work and sorry that we can't deliver better news on this case.



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Photographs: Anna Griffiths, Julia Tucker & Gem Simmons.

