



SSC Marine Mammal Rescue Year in Review 2017



MMRT expands response territory!

When the New England Aquarium forfeited its NH territory in 2014, they also forfeited the northern portion of Massachusetts, leaving a gap in marine mammal rescue coverage. Our Marine Mammal Rescue Team (MMRT) stepped up and has been assisting NOAA Fisheries with response since that time. In 2017 we applied to formally take over the MA territory. MMRT is happy to share that it has been formally granted the additional territory and is now covering from Essex, MA, north to the Maine border! As part of this expansion, MMRT will open a satellite office at Mass Audubon's Joppa Flats Education Center in 2018 to run the MA branch.

Rescue and response highlights

A bad year for whales



Whales in the Greater Atlantic Region (Maine to Virginia) took a hard hit in 2017. Prior to Snowplow the humpback whale that beached in Rye in 2016, the last whale to land on shore in NH was in 2006. During 2017, MMR responded to two minke whales on shore in NH and received report of another floating in northern MA. The trend was found throughout the Greater Atlantic Region, as well as in Canada and North Carolina. Stranding organizations responded to a significantly higher than average number of whales on shore, both live and dead. As a result, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration declared Unusual Mortality Events for humpback, minke, and the highly endangered North Atlantic right whale species.

WE RESPONDED to 111 marine mammal cases (68 live and 43 deceased). These include 102 pinnipeds (seals) and 9 cetaceans (porpoises, dolphins, whales). The breakdown of species is as follows: 87 harbor seals, 8 gray seals, 5 harp seals, 2 unknown seal species, 4 harbor porpoise, 1 common dolphin, 1 Atlantic white-sided dolphin, and 3 minke whales.

WE RESCUED 7 seals in need of intervention, and either relocated them to a quieter and safer area where they were tagged and released, or transported them for rehabilitation.

WE RECEIVED 717.25 hours of service from 31 volunteer field responders. Our rescue staff would not be able to respond to all reports without their assistance.

WE EDUCATED thousands of people of through outreach programs, events, and on-the-beach conversations during responses, helping them understand why doing our part to keep the ocean healthy is vitally important.

WE CONTRIBUTED to scientific research and advancement by conducting necropsies both in the field and in the lab, on 7 seals and 2 whales in partnership with the New England Aquarium.

WE RAISED AWARENESS for MMRT and the federally protected marine mammals it responds to through three major fundraising events.

Continued on back.



Seal Diamond: first harp seal released

On February 18, 2017 our team responded to a male juvenile harp seal on Seabrook Beach. Harp seals are referred to as ice seals because they are born on pack ice in the Canadian Provinces. They only travel down to our coastal waters during the winter months when conditions are ideal. The seal was monitored for a day and half before we made the decision to transport him to the National Marine Life Center in Bourne, MA for rehabilitation. Seal Diamond (named after singer Neil Diamond for his vocal personality) was treated for infected wounds, severe internal parasites, and critical dehydration. He spent the next five and a half weeks in rehabilitation where he gained 57.5 pounds and was released on March 30, 2017. Without a doubt, Seal Diamond would not have survived without intervention: a perfect example of the important work we do to save these federally protected marine mammals.

Greater Atlantic Regional Stranding Conference

MMRT is part of a greater network of response organizations from the northern east coast, stretching from Maine to Virginia. As part of this network, we attend an annual conference to discuss trends, relevant issues, research, and techniques. In 2017, MMRT partnered with New England Aquarium's rescue team to host the conference. For four days in October, we convened in Hull, MA, joined by other researchers, students, and biologists. MMRT was honored to be in a position to be able to co-host this important conference with its MA colleagues.

Raising funds while having fun!

Each year, MMRT holds three signature fundraising events to raise awareness and critical operational funds. The **Rescue Run: Race for Marine Mammals** is a 5k trail run and kid's fun run held in April. In June, we hold **Sippin' for Seals**, a cocktail reception-style event, complete with live music, food and games. In September, we cruise the Merrimack River during our **Save the Seals River Cruise**, where guests enjoy hors d'oeuvres, a lively silent auction, and seal watching. The success of these events, in part, is due to the support of many generous, local businesses through sponsorship.

The Seals Cannot Pay

The Seacoast Science Center must raise funds to operate the Marine Mammal Rescue program and be equipped to respond to not only a predicted average of cases, but also emergency situations, such as a whale stranding or an unusual marine mammal mortality event. We rely on the support of local businesses and community members to help us meet our operating budget.

Rescue Supplies Wish List

Because people often ask how they can help the rescue team, aside from a financial donation or volunteering, we have created a Wish List of much needed items on Amazon. The list includes items such as gas cards, exam gloves, fluids for seals, protective wear, and more. If you are looking to help, you can find a link to our Amazon Wishlist on the Marine Mammal Rescue, How to Help page on our website.

Lending a Hand

MMRT staff and volunteers lent a helping hand to New England Aquarium's Marine Animal Rescue Program during their annual sea turtle cold stun season again this year. Rescue staff Ashley Stokes and Sarah Toupin have been trained as clinicians and can now assist with physical exams, blood draws, and administering of injections, fluids, and oral medicine.

FOR A COMPLETE 2017 DONOR LIST visit www.seacoastsciencecenter.org

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The Seacoast Science Center is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization providing educational experiences at Odiorne Point State Park on behalf of New Hampshire State Parks.

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