

Bearded seal strays from Arctic to Florida

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Experts are trying to capture a bearded seal that strayed into Florida's Intracoastal Waterway, hundreds of miles from its Arctic home.

The seal was last seen at 2 a.m. Saturday near the Hobe Sound Bridge south of Palm Beach, the Palm Beach Post reported.

The animal is the first bearded seal ever recorded in Florida waters. Seals of any kind are unusual there, and Arctic species almost unknown. The only recorded sighting of a bearded seal outside its normal range since 1978 was in Gloucester, Mass., in 2002.

Chris Dold, a veterinarian at SeaWorld Orlando, who saw video of the seal, said that it looked dehydrated. He said that the seal's neck is too thin as well.

The seal is likely to have trouble feeding in the warm waters off Florida, and the water in the Intracoastal Waterway, which is brackish rather than salt, could also cause damage.

The first sighting was late Thursday near a gated waterfront community, Loblolly Bay, and the seal spent much of Friday in the area. Residents tried to make the animal comfortable, even posting signs warning against slamming doors because the noise appeared to scare the seal.

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