

# Search on for entangled whale off Calif. coast

April 19 2012, By ROBERT JABLON , Associated Press

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This image provided April 17, 2012, by Capt. Dave's Dolphin and Whale Safari shows a gray whale entangled in netting in the waters off the coast of Southern California April 17, 2012. Rescuers say they were able to loosen some of the fishing line that entangled this 40-foot gray whale off the Southern California coast before ending rescue operations for the day. Rescue operations are set to resume Wednesday April 18, 2012. (AP Photo/Capt. Dave's Dolphin and Whale Safari)

(AP) -- Boats and helicopters scoured the Southern California waters Wednesday for a 40-foot gray whale that became tangled in fishing line while migrating the wrong way.

The U.S. Coast Guard and volunteers were on the lookout in Orange and San Diego counties for the whale, a day after rescuers managed to remove some [fishing line](#) from its body, said Melissa Sciacca, spokeswoman for the nonprofit Pacific [Marine Mammal](#) Center. The

whale could starve unless it turns around.

"There are lots of choppers and boats but it's a big ocean so it could be anywhere," she said. "The animals travel far and fast."

The whale was spotted off the coast of Laguna Beach in Orange County and volunteers managed to remove about 100 feet of plastic fishing line from its body Tuesday before darkness fell. More line remained tangled around its head and left pectoral fin, which over time could cut into the whale and cause infections or even amputate the fin, said Dave Anderson, skipper of a whalewatching business who took his boat out to disentangle the whale.

The adult whale - which did not take kindly to the rescue efforts - appeared to be caught in lines that may have held lobster or crab traps, which the animal may have blundered into in shallow water, Anderson said.

The [rescuers](#) pulled up and attached three colored [buoys](#) to help find the whale again, the used knives on long poles to cut away some of the line, Anderson said.

Because the line was around the whale's head, the boat had to close in and get near the whale's tail flukes, he said.

"The whale is not happy with the buoys and the boat being added to what she was towing around, so she ended up throwing her tail around," he said.

Nobody was hurt, he added, and the whale appears to be healthy.

The whale was moving down the coast and could have made it 50 miles or more, Anderson said.

Gray [whales](#) migrate from Arctic seas to lagoons in Baja California, Mexico in the fall on a journey of thousands of miles. They give birth in the warm lagoons and most usually begin heading north again by mid-April.

However, the tangled whale appeared to be heading down to Mexico, which is "not normal at all," Anderson said.

Gray whales eat crustaceans by sucking up sand from the ocean floor and filtering it through a sieve-like structure called baleen.

There is little for the whale to eat in the Mexican lagoons and the whale will be in trouble unless it turns around, Anderson said.

"He should be heading up toward the Arctic ... he needs to further up the coast," he said.

It is not unusual for whales and other sea mammals to become tangled in fishing lines, Anderson said. The whale is the third to be spotted tangled in fishing gear in the area in the past month, although it could have picked up the line from someplace farther away, Anderson said.

Many entangled whales, dolphins and other sea mammals never make near shore to be rescued, he said.

"Most of these whales wind up dying out to sea somewhere and nobody even knows that they were caught in a net," he said.

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