

# Drone footage captures moment pilot whale expels placenta off Shetland

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Credit: Nick McCaffrey

Unearthed video footage from 2019 shows a pilot whale expelling its placenta in Yell Sound, Shetland.

Drone pilot Nick McCaffrey didn't realize how unique his footage was until he shared it with Emily Hague, a marine [mammal](#) researcher in Heriot-Watt's Marine Spatial Analysis Group.

Hague and McCaffrey have now [published the footage](#) in the academic journal *Aquatic Mammals* and say the clip gives insight into the lives of pilot whales.

McCaffrey said, "I knew at the time I had witnessed something significant, but it took a moment to realize that was looking at a pilot whale placenta. After that, the behaviors I was observing became a whole lot more intriguing."

Hague said, "Drone footage is helping us capture moments that would be impossible to see from land or boat, giving us a new insight into the underwater world.

"Until now, knowledge of where pilot whales have their calves was extremely limited. In fact, we don't have much understanding of where many marine mammals give birth.

"We do know that whales and [dolphins](#) tend to expel the [placenta](#) within 12 hours of giving [birth](#), so we can be pretty sure that this pilot whale had its calf in U.K. waters.

"Understanding marine mammals' behavior, knowing where they mate and reproduce, can help us know where to target protection of the marine environment so that they can thrive."

**More information:** Emily L. Hague et al, Previously Undocumented Long-Finned Pilot Whale (*Globicephala melas*) Placental Expulsion in Coastal Waters of Shetland, United Kingdom, *Aquatic Mammals* (2022). [DOI: 10.1578/AM.48.6.2022.610](https://doi.org/10.1578/AM.48.6.2022.610)

Provided by Heriot-Watt University

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