

# Cape Cod strands more dolphins than anywhere else. Now they're getting their own hospital

August 24 2023, by Mark Pratt

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An International Fund for Animal Welfare team carries a stranded common dolphin to a waiting vehicle while another waits to be rescued at Herring River, Jan. 19, 2012, in Wellfleet, Mass. The organization that protects animals worldwide is opening a first-of-its-kind dolphin hospital on Cape Cod in August 2023, that will not only improve survivability rates but enhance the groundbreaking response techniques it has developed over 25 years. Credit: AP

Photo/Julia Cumes, File

When members of the marine mammal team from the International Fund for Animal Welfare rush to a Cape Cod beach to help a stranded dolphin or porpoise, they have no choice but to treat the endangered animal on site and then immediately release it.

That is about to change.

The organization, which protects animals worldwide, is opening a first-of-its-kind short-term dolphin hospital on Cape Cod this month that it hopes will not only improve survivability rates, but also enhance the research it has developed over 25 years.

Stranded marine mammals are stressed, in shock and dehydrated, said Brian Sharp, director of the rescue team. Simply caring for them at the scene is often not enough. They need additional diagnostics, treatment and [recovery time](#).

"With this ICU for dolphins, we'll be able to get them treatment that's needed, then be able to release them quickly," he said.

While there are marine [mammal](#) rehabilitation centers that can take care of animals for months or even years, the goal of this facility is to release them back into the ocean within four days, he said.

"This is the first time that this has been attempted before," Sharp said.

There are more live marine mammal strandings on Cape Cod than anywhere else in the world, Sharp said. The welfare fund has responded to more than 400 live stranded dolphins, whales and porpoises in the

region in the past five years alone, the organization said in a news release.



A dead common dolphin is marked as such at Herring River, Jan. 19, 2012, in Wellfleet, Mass. The organization International Fund for Animal Welfare that protects animals worldwide is opening a first-of-its-kind dolphin hospital on Cape Cod in August 2023, that will not only improve survivability rates but enhance the groundbreaking response techniques it has developed over 25 years. Credit: AP Photo/Julia Cumes, File

Cape Cod is a good habitat for dolphins, but a risky one. Its [geography](#)—it is basically a hook-shaped spit of sand jutting into the ocean—can

make dolphin navigation difficult, and 12-foot tides can quickly expose a mile of beach.

The 4,200-square-foot (390-square-meter) Dolphin Rescue Center is in a renovated retail space in downtown Orleans.

It includes an 1,800-square-foot (167-square-meter) rehabilitation area with two treatment pools 15 feet (4.3 meters) across and a veterinary laboratory. The public will not be permitted to have direct contact with the animals being a cared for, but there is also an education center where visitors will be able to watch the recovering animals on a monitor.

Staffed by four full-time workers, it is equipped to provide round-the-clock care. It will start by treating one animal at a time, but the goal is to eventually treat multiple animals simultaneously.

The privately funded center has been federally inspected and expects to open by the end of the month, Sharp said.

"We want to take what we learn here and share it nationally, internationally," he said.

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