

Endangered right whale calf found dead on Georgia's Cumberland Island

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An endangered North Atlantic right whale calf that was recently spotted with severe wounds from a vessel strike has been found dead on Georgia's Cumberland Island, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said March 2.

The [calf](#) was first seen with significant head injuries in early January off

the coast of South Carolina while swimming with its mother, a whale named Juno.

Weeks later on Feb. 1, Juno and the calf were spotted again by survey teams about 20 miles off of Georgia's Sapelo Island, offering a glimmer of hope that the animal might survive. But that optimism was extinguished Sunday, after the calf washed ashore on Cumberland Island.

"The carcass was heavily scavenged by sharks," NOAA said on its website. "Responders identified it as Juno's calf based on the unique injuries and markings documented when the calf was alive. Due to the state of the carcass, we will use genetic testing to determine the sex."

The agency said a necropsy will be performed.

North Atlantic right whales are among the rarest large whale species on the planet. Boat strikes and fishing gear entanglements are among the greatest threats to the animals, but [climate change](#) is also thought to be contributing to their shrinking population.

The calf is the second of the endangered whales to die along the Georgia coast in recent weeks.

Last month, a year-old right whale, one of only about 360 believed to be left on Earth, was found dead off Georgia's Tybee Island. It was likely killed by a boat strike, too, federal officials announced.

In January, another right whale was found dead off Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. Its cause of death was determined to be chronic injuries from entanglement in commercial fishing gear.

NOAA is considering expanding [speed limits](#) in the whales' calving zone

to include boats measuring 35 feet and above. The move has been opposed by the [maritime industry](#) and some Georgia lawmakers, but conservationists say slowing boats down is key to saving the whales and called on President Joe Biden's administration to act.

"The first North Atlantic right whale calf of the season never made it out of the nursery," Kathleen Collins, senior marine campaign manager for IFAW said in a statement. "It suffered a slow, agonizing death for half its short life. Three dead [right whales](#) in just over a month is heartbreaking and preventable. We need increased protections for this species now before it's too late."

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