

Dead whale in New Jersey had a fractured skull among numerous injuries, experts find

April 12 2024, by Wayne Parry



A dead humpback whale rolls in the surf in Long Beach Township on New Jersey's Long Beach Island on Thursday, April 11, 2024. On Friday, a marine animal rescue group that examined the animal said it sustained numerous blunt force injuries including a fractured skull. Credit: AP Photo/Wayne Parry

A post-mortem examination of a whale that washed ashore on New

Jersey's Long Beach Island found that the animal had sustained numerous blunt force injuries including a fractured skull and vertebrae.

The Marine Mammal Stranding Center on Friday released observations from a necropsy done Thursday evening on the nearly 25-foot (7.6-meter) juvenile male humpback whale that was [found dead](#) in Long Beach Township.

Sheila Dean, director of the center, said the whale was found to have bruising around the head; multiple fractures of the skull and cervical vertebrae; numerous dislocated ribs, and a dislocated shoulder bone.

"These injuries are consistent with blunt force trauma," she wrote in a posting on the group's Facebook page.

Reached afterward, Dean would not attribute the injuries to any particular cause, noting that extensive testing as part of the necropsy remains to be done, with tissue samples sent to laboratories across the country.

"We only report what we see," she said.

The animal's cause of death is of intense interest to many amid an ongoing controversy involving a belief by opponents of offshore wind power that site preparation work for the projects is harming or killing whales along the U.S. East Coast.

Numerous scientific agencies, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; the Marine Mammal Commission; the U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, [say there is no evidence](#) linking offshore wind preparation to whale deaths.



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NOAA said Friday there have been 16 large whale deaths on the East Coast in 2024: 7 humpbacks between Massachusetts and North Carolina; 4 North Atlantic right whales, which are critically endangered, in Massachusetts, Virginia, and Georgia; two sperm whales in South Carolina and Florida; two minke whales in North Carolina and Virginia, and one fin whale in Rhode Island.

In 2023, there were 82 large whale deaths along the East Coast, the

agency said.

The stranding center's website said this was New Jersey's first whale death of the year, following 14 in 2023.

Leading Light Wind is one of three wind farms proposed off the New Jersey coast. It said in a statement issued late Thursday that "our community should guard against misinformation campaigns in response to these incidents," noting that many of the previous whale deaths have been attributed by scientists to vessel strikes or entanglement with fishing gear.

Protect Our Coast NJ, one of the most staunchly anti-offshore wind groups, voiced renewed skepticism of official pronouncements on the whale deaths, referencing similar distrust from some quarters of official information regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Blaming all of the cetacean deaths on entanglements and ship strikes is reminiscent of the phenomenon four years ago in which seemingly every death was a COVID death, no matter how old or how sick the patient was prior to contracting the virus," the group said in a statement Thursday.

Leading Light, whose project would be built about 40 miles (64 kilometers) off Long Beach Island, said it is committed to building the project in a way that minimizes risks to wildlife.

"Minimizing impacts to the marine environment is of the utmost importance to Leading Light Wind," leaders of the project said. "Along with providing advance notices about our survey activity and facilitating active engagement with maritime stakeholders, Leading Light Wind is investing in monitoring and mitigation initiatives to ensure the offshore wind industry can thrive alongside a healthy marine environment."

The post-mortem examination of the whale also showed evidence of past entanglement with fishing gear, although none was present when the whale washed ashore. Scars from a previous entanglement unrelated to the stranding event were found around the peduncle, which is the muscular area where the tail connects to the body; on the tail itself, and on the right front pectoral flipper.

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