



The Marine  
Mammal Center.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: The Marine Mammal Center: Laura Sherr (443) 854-7434 // [Media@tmmc.org](mailto:Media@tmmc.org)

**Preliminary findings - blue whale necropsy**

(SAUSALITO, Calif. – May 27, 2017) – A necropsy on a stranded blue whale today revealed that the creature died of blunt force trauma due to boat strike. The entire left lateral side of the body had injuries, including muscle that was hemorrhaged and necrotic with approximately 10 ribs that were broken in multiple places. The spine was badly fractured, and the skull showed signs of trauma as well. These injuries are indicative of significant blunt force trauma that is consistent with ship strikes.

A team of 25 scientists and volunteers from The Marine Mammal Center, California Academy of Sciences, UC Davis' Oiled Wildlife Care Network, Point Blue, and Oceanic Society came together to perform the necropsy at Agate Beach in Bolinas, CA.

The blue whale was an adult female, not a subadult as previously reported. She measured 24 meters, or about 79 feet. Information from Cascadia Research's long-term photo-ID database of identified blue whales revealed a match based on unique fluke markings. This particular female was first identified off California in 1999 and seen in at least 11 different years mostly in the Santa Barbara Channel area. She was seen with a calf approximately 2-3 years ago, confirming her adult status.

"Thanks to the identification of this particular animal from Cascadia Research's database, we had an extremely rare opportunity to understand more about the life of this individual," says Dr. Claire Simeone, Conservation Medicine Veterinarian at The Marine Mammal Center. "Having access to this whale's history helps us to better understand this endangered species as a whole."

A full necropsy report will be available within 2 weeks. Scientists collected skin tissue and blubber samples for further testing.

"It is a tragedy that this whale's story ended due to vessel collision," says Barbie Halaska, research scientists at The Marine Mammal Center. "These types of examinations have enabled the scientific community to make recommendations for slower shipping speeds and route changes, and hopefully that will help future whales."

When it comes to human impacts, ship strikes are a leading cause of whale mortality, along with entanglement in fishing gear. Large whales are vulnerable to collisions with all vessel types, sizes and classes throughout the world's ocean. In California, ship strikes of gray whales are the most commonly reported followed by fin, blue, humpback and sperm whales. When large vessels such as container ships

are involved, the ship's crew may be unaware a strike has occurred. As such, the number of ship strikes to whales is likely under-reported.

Among the many threats faced by whales today are ship strikes, which occur more and more in busy shipping lanes. A collaboration of government agencies, academic institutions, nonprofit conservation groups and private-sector companies have developed Whale Alert, an app that helps reduce the chance of fatal ship strikes by large vessels. The app can be used by anyone out on the water to report concentrations of cetaceans. It displays active whale management areas, required reporting areas, recommended routes, areas to be avoided and near real-time warnings in shipping lanes along the east and west coasts of the United States and Canada. This information allows vessel operators to avoid collision with whales by slowing down and heightening their visual awareness. For more information visit: [Whalealert.org](http://Whalealert.org)

The Center's rescue department first received public reports of the stranded cetacean late Thursday evening. Blue whales are the largest animal on earth and are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Approximately 2,800 blue whales live off the California Coast and can be seen in the summer and fall in places like the Gulf of the Farallones and Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuaries. The Center has previously responded to 8 blue whales in its 42-year history including a 65-foot blue whale at Westmoor Beach in Daly City in October 2016.

#### **ASSETS:**

Updated images are available for download and media use here: [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/2hfbbbxjresd751/AADjrbPH\\_EZ6nJGY7AZpFPoba?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/2hfbbbxjresd751/AADjrbPH_EZ6nJGY7AZpFPoba?dl=0) Also in this folder is a document with caption and credit information.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Blue whales are the largest animal on earth and have a distinct blue-gray coloration, mottled with light gray. They normally swim individually or in small groups and pairs are commonly seen. The cetaceans are long and streamlined, with extremely small dorsal fins and long, thin pectoral flippers. Blue whales are rorqual whales, a family of baleen whales with pleated throat grooves that expand when the animal takes in water while feeding. There are between 8,000-9,000 blue whales worldwide and the 2,800 blue whales that feed along the California coast make up the largest concentration of the population in the world.

#### **HOW THE PUBLIC CAN HELP**

- Report sick and injured marine mammals to The Marine Mammal Center by calling 415-289-SEAL (7325)
- Maintain a safe distance of at least 50 feet from a stranded cetacean and keep dogs away.
- The Marine Mammal Center is a nonprofit facility and depends on donations from members of the public to respond to and care for animals such as this stranded cetacean. Visit [www.MarineMammalCenter.org/donate](http://www.MarineMammalCenter.org/donate) to help the Center perform its life-saving work.

#### **ABOUT THE MARINE MAMMAL CENTER**

At The Marine Mammal Center, we are guided and inspired by a shared vision of a healthy ocean for marine mammals and humans alike. Our mission is to advance global ocean conservation through marine mammal rescue and rehabilitation, scientific research, and education. Since 1975, the Center has been headquartered in the Marin Headlands, Sausalito, Calif., within the Golden Gate National Parks and

has rescued and treated nearly 20,000 marine mammals. In 2014, the Center opened Ke Kai Ola, a hospital for the rehabilitation of the endangered Hawaiian monk seal, in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii.

For more information, please visit [www.MarineMammalCenter.org](http://www.MarineMammalCenter.org). Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).