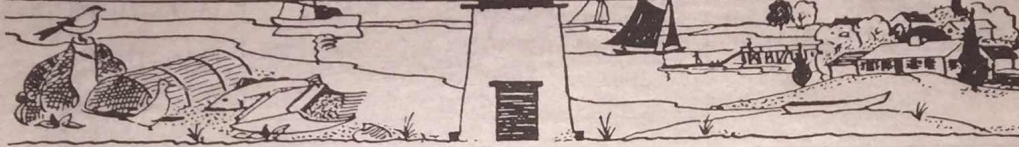




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2 Sections

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DAY OF THE DOLPHINS



A cart transports a stranded dolphin toward the water's edge. Photo by Constantine Gregory

Mass stranding requires supreme effort from volunteers

Editor's note: From Thursday through Monday, 59 dolphins stranded between Dennis and Wellfleet. Twenty-seven were found alive and 19 were rescued and released. On Saturday alone, 19 dolphins were stranded, 13 taken off the beaches for relocation and 11 successfully released. Freelance writer Laurie Balliett, who volunteers for the International Fund for Animal Welfare's Marine Mammal Rescue and Research Team, shares her account of the rescue.

By Laurie Balliett

It was 9:15 Saturday morning, and I had a full agenda set for my day, when the phone rang.

"Would you have any availability to go to Wellfleet to help with some stranded dolphins?" It was the International Fund for Animal Welfare's Marine Mammal Stranding Network. I hedged at first, and then quickly caved. The message was clear: "There are dolphins dying on the beach, they are stranded, and they need help."

"How many are there?" I asked.

"It's huge. There are dolphins stranded from Dennis to Wellfleet, and the calls are still

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It takes
six to
eight
people to
transport
one adult
dolphin....
The work
is grueling.

Dog debate continues

Use of Drummer Boy Park draws a feisty crowd

By Rich Eldred
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BREWSTER — Is Brewster going to the dogs? Some people seem to think so while others believed man's best friend is unjustly maligned.

The was a packed house at the board of health's public hearing Tuesday on the board's proposed rule closing Drummer Boy Park to dogs from May 1 to Oct. 1.

Last year the dog committee came up with two proposals for dog parks, one fenced in at Drummer Boy and one behind the police station. Both plans were tabled by the selectmen.

In response to complaints about dogs at Drummer Boy the selectmen created a dog committee in 2010. They came up with two proposals for an official fenced in dog park, one at Drummer Boy, one behind the police station, but both were tabled by the selectmen last fall. The board of health stepped into the breach.

The audience, about 100 people, was pretty well divided on the issue.

Martin Jacobs noted there was a "defacto agreement" between the town and dog owners that Drummer Boy Park was the place to go.

"There are 1,012 dog licenses issued in this town, and probably 2,000 dogs," he said. "The health of people who own dogs is enhanced by exercising with dogs and by exercising in bucolic settings like Drummer Boy Park, which is far more advantageous than an asphalt surface."

But others thought the proposed ban was a half measure.

"You go from April 29 to May 1, and everything is healthy and safe? There should be no dogs in

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It's time
to vote
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ORLEANS



Dolphins rescued in Wellfleet are prepared for release at Scusset Beach in Sandwich. Originally, the dolphins were set to be released from Herring Cove Beach in Provincetown, but seas were too rough. Photo by Constantine Gregory

Dolphins

continued from Page 1

coming in," said the woman on the phone. "It sounds like it's going to be a long, all-day thing," she said.

Everything else fell away. I put on fleece pants and long johns, winter socks, hat and gloves. I grabbed my waders from the garage, and jumped into my SUV.

At the wharf in Wellfleet, IFAW's Brian Sharp orchestrated the relief effort from a phone in a truck. He informed me there were crews working in Brewster and Orleans. He directed me to Power's Landing, just down the road from the pier.

At the landing, five cushioned mats lay spread across the floor of a large truck, waiting for dolphins. I recognized IFAW employee Jane Hoppe and greeted some of the volunteers. Then we went to work.

I walked across the tidal flats to the first live dolphin, and learned there were four dolphins alive at this beach. Nine others were dead. Without buoyancy in the water, dolphins, whose weight can reach just short of 300 pounds, can suffer crushed ribs or internal damage.

A dolphin's skin rips easily, too. Jane, a tiny but strong IFAW responder, carefully slid a plastic stretcher under this first dolphin, trying not to damage its skin. The stretchers have holes sewn into them for the dolphin's two pectoral fins or "flippers." With three people on each side, we lifted the dolphin into the back of a pick-up truck onto a mattress. We tried not to slide the animal, moving it only when lifting. A first responder, who I knew only as "Tracy," who wore a stethoscope and mask around her neck, assessed the animal's health.

We moved three more dolphins. One was a calf, which we placed next to the nearest live adult to help comfort it.

As I worked, I felt a ferocious instinct to protect these animals. I worried about their fins getting damaged in the move, and took extra care to not touch them unless absolutely necessary. We spoke quietly, if at all, in an attempt to keep the dolphins' stress levels down, treating them like the intensive care patients that they were.

There are theories as to why dolphins strand. One is that their echolocation, which they use to sense geography, becomes

absorbed into the sands of the tidal flats when there are no drop-offs to bounce against to alert them of shallow depth. Another is that they get confused, like any out-of-town tourist who ventures onto the tidal flats, unaware how quickly the tides turn. Another is that because they are social animals and travel in pods, if one strands, the others follow. The scientists don't know.

We loaded the four dolphins, including the calf, onto the truck. The winds and tides made it so we couldn't use the normal release spot at Herring Cove in Provincetown.

When I arrived at the release site, Scusset Beach in Sandwich, an IFAW team was conducting medical tests on four of the five dolphins found in Eastham. One large dolphin had made it all the way to the release site but died from stress just as the truck arrived.

It takes six to eight people to transport one adult dolphin, and many of us wore waders. The work is grueling. I work out daily and this was the hardest work-out I can remember. Others wore dry suits. They were the ones who walked into the deepest water, guiding the heads of the dolphins back into their natural environment. I wore waders, so I helped with the tails.

The calf on the truck suddenly appeared much smaller and even more vulnerable than it did when we took it off the beach. The adult and the two juveniles had been vocalizing to each other during the ride from Wellfleet to Sandwich.

There weren't enough volunteers to release the entire dozen together, so we released groups of from two to five. The mother and the juveniles were released together, the baby, flipping and slapping hard as soon as it felt water under its body.

Sunday, as I drove from Truro to Eastham, the IFAW truck passed me. I worried the dolphins we released had re-beached themselves. The weather was frigid, 14 degrees. I thought about how exhausted the IFAW team must be, and of their endurance. How grateful I was that the dolphins I had helped had stranded on a warmer day.

I gave a quick call to find out their fate. The team had one dolphin in the back of the truck, and they were on the way to release it at Herring Cove Beach in Provincetown.

"Do you have any availability?" they asked.



A dolphin and her calf are loaded onto an IFAW truck. The two were later released at Scusset Beach in Sandwich. Photo by Laurie Balliett

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