

ELUSIVE WHALE IS FINALLY FREE THANKS TO NEW SEDATION TECHNIQUE

An endangered north Atlantic right whale may live to see another season thanks to the persistent efforts to disentangle it from life-threatening gear. Atlantic Large Whale Disentanglement Team partners including representatives from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, NOAA, Wildlife Trust, New England Aquarium and others used a new sedation technique on Friday, March 6 to successfully remove more than 380 feet of line.

This is the first time in worldwide history a free-swimming large whale was successfully sedated in the wild according to experts at NOAA Fisheries Service and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

The implications of this are far reaching as successful sedation can provide safer working conditions for humans and whales, and decrease the amount of time crews invest in pursuing and attempting to rescue entangled whales.

This whale, known as #3311 was first sighted off the Georgia coast January 14, 2009 by a Wildlife Trust aerial survey plane. A Georgia Department of Natural Resources crew responded immediately via boat to assess the whale's condition, attach a tracking buoy, and remove 560 feet of trailing rope. The whale was still severely entangled, so disentanglement teams attempted to assist this whale again on January 22 and 23, February 1, and March 5. The whale turned out to be very evasive making further attempts difficult.

After administering the sedative, teams were able safely approach the whale and remove an additional 380 feet of line, leaving the whale 90 percent gear-free.

Disentanglement team and veterinarian partners included:

- NOAA Fisheries Service
- Georgia Department of Natural Resources
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Coastwise Consulting, Inc.
- Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution
- University of Florida
- Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies
- New England Aquarium
- Wildlife Trust
- United States Coast Guard

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Photos and video available from NOAA Fisheries Service

<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/mm/rightwhales/RightWhaleDisentanglement.htm>