

The South African Association for Marine Biological Research



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RESEARCH INSTITUTE



Helping people to care for our ocean

# First Response for Stranded Marine Animals in KwaZulu-Natal



Photo: SAAMBR

Southern elephant seal in Southbroom

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# KZN Marine Stranding Network



This is a group of skilled and trained professionals affiliated to a variety of organisations working together to provide knowledge, experience and resources to assist at marine stranding events while ensuring the best possible outcomes for animal welfare and/or conservation.

## KZN Marine Stranding Network partners:



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**KWAZULU-NATAL SHARKS BOARD**  
Maritime Centre of Excellence

Helping people to care for our ocean



**environmental affairs**  
Department:  
Environmental Affairs  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

# What is a stranded animal?

A marine animal is considered stranded when it is unable to return to its natural habitat on its own or without assistance. Animals that strand may be alive or dead, and they can strand in groups (mass strandings) or as single individuals.

## Why do marine animals come ashore?

### Natural factors

- Social cohesive nature of whales and dolphins.
- Disease or parasitic infection.
- Rapid change of water depth.
- Anomalies in the Earth's magnetic field.
- Abandoned new borns and malnourished juveniles.
- Severe storms and weather conditions.
- Chased into shallow water by predators.
- Natural toxins, i.e. red tides.
- To rest or moult (seals).
- To nest (turtles).

### Man-made factors

- Noise interference e.g. seismic surveys.
- Pollution e.g. oil spills, entanglement or ingesting plastic.
- Sustained injury e.g. collision with boats.

## Which live animals do we record in KZN?

- Whales
- Dolphins
- Turtles
- Seals
- Penguins
- Coastal birds
- Whale sharks



A juvenile striped dolphin with injured peduncle.

**Dead animals should also be reported.**  
**Whole animals or samples thereof are important for research.**

# What to do if you find a stranded animal

The first priority is to seek professional help as soon as possible.  
Please follow these important steps in assisting us:

## Step 1: Call Authorities

- Notify the relevant authority immediately. They are listed in this booklet under the related species.
- Each stranding incident is unique. You will be guided as to the next step based on information available.
- **The speed and correct response to a stranding are often the most crucial factors determining the success or failure of the rescue.**

## Step 3: Gather Information

1. Take a photo of the animal, preferably with a cell phone. Send it to the relevant authority. This helps with speedy identification and decision making.
2. Condition of the animal: alive, dead or injured.
3. Exact location and directions to the stranding.
4. Name and number of contact person at the stranding site.
5. Date and time of your observations.

## Step 2: Approach Cautiously

- A sudden approach may startle any animal that is still alive, causing stress to the animal and risk to you.
- Remember that these animals are not only wild, but under an incredible amount of stress. As a result they may act aggressively by biting or delivering an accidental smack with their tail.
- Stress is the number one killer of stranded animals.

## Step 4: Stay With The Animal

1. The relevant authority will stay in communication with the person at the stranding site.
2. Specific guidance will be provided to you from the relevant authority until they arrive at the stranding.
3. It is important to keep members of the public and pets at bay to prevent any further stress to the stranded animal.
4. Put someone in charge of crowd control.

# Dolphin & whale stranding (smaller 6m)

Contact uShaka Sea World

031 328 8222 (o/h) 031 328 8060 (a/h)

## Do

- Follow steps on Page 4.
- Keep everyone present as quiet as possible.
- Keep the animal upright so less pressure is placed on internal organs. This can be done by digging holes in the sand underneath the flippers and tail.
- Keep the animal cool and comfortable by filling holes dug out for the fins and tail with water.
- Overheating can also be prevented by covering the animal with a wet towel or sheet. The towel must be constantly moistened.
- A shade structure can be erected to cover the animal.

**Transport of a dolphin/whale is prohibited unless authorised by the relevant authority.**

## Do Not

- Do not attempt to cool the animal by pouring water down the blow hole. **This will cause the animal to drown.**
- Do not place the towel or sheet over the eyes or blowhole.
- Do not apply any oil-based cream such as sun block to the animal's skin.
- Do not attempt to move the animal.
- Do not return the animal to the water.



A stranded dolphin is covered with wet towels.



A stranded Humpback whale.

## Whale stranding (larger 6m)

Contact uShaka Sea World

031 328 8222 (o/h)

031 328 8060 (a/h)



# Seals

## Contact uShaka Sea World

031 328 8222 (o/h) 031 328 8060 (a/h)

- Vagrant seals regularly wash up onto KwaZulu-Natal beaches between May and September.
- Not all seals found on beaches in KwaZulu-Natal are sick or injured. Seals often come ashore to rest or moult. If given the opportunity to rest without disturbance, they usually go back to the sea on their own when they are ready.

### Do

- Follow steps on Page 4.
- Set up a 5m perimeter around the seal to keep onlookers at bay until the relevant authorities are on site.

### Do Not

- Do not chase the seal back into the sea. It will probably wash up on another beach later, delaying assessment and rescue action.
- Do not touch, feed or handle the seal in any way.



Photo: Source Unknown

A stranded sub-Antarctic fur seal in KwaZulu-Natal.



Photo: C. Bodenstaff

A resident South African fur seal in Cape Town harbour.



Photo: C. Bodenstaff

A resting stranded Southern elephant seal in Southbroom, KwaZulu-Natal.

# Turtles

Contact uShaka Sea World

031 328 8222 (o/h) 031 328 8060 (a/h)

- Five species of turtles can be found in KwaZulu-Natal waters.
  - Only Loggerhead and Leatherback turtles nest on the beaches of iSimangaliso.
  - Nesting occurs from October to March.

**Transport of a turtle is prohibited unless authorised by the relevant authority.**

## Do

- Follow steps on Page 4.



Olive Ridley turtle



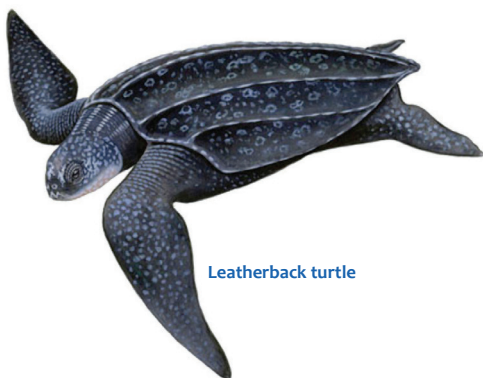
Green turtle



Loggerhead turtle

## Do Not

- Do not place back in the sea.
- Do not attempt to move the turtle before the rescue team arrives. Turtles are not generally aggressive, but they are capable of delivering a nasty bite.
- Never place a turtle on its back as this can cause pressure on its lungs from the internal organs.



Leatherback turtle



Hawksbill turtle

# Penguins

## Contact uShaka Sea World

031 328 8222 (o/h) 031 328 8060 (a/h)

- African penguins and many other seabirds are not resident along the KwaZulu-Natal coastline.
- They follow the sardine run during the winter months and are found injured or exhausted on the beach.

### Do

- Follow steps on Page 4.
- Place the penguin in a ventilated box, and leave in a quiet dark place until the rescue team arrives.
- Take care as penguins deliver a nasty bite.

**Transport of a penguin is prohibited unless authorised by the relevant authority.**

### Do Not

- Do not place the penguin back in the sea.
- Do not handle the penguin unnecessarily.
- Do not place in ice water or on ice.
- Do not attempt to move a severely injured penguin. Wait for the rescue team to arrive.
- Do not attempt to feed the penguin or give it water.
- Do not remove fishing gut or hooks from a penguin.



Photo: SAAMBR

A stranded juvenile African penguin



Photo: SAAMBR

A stranded moulting African penguin



Photo: SAAMBR

An adult African penguin



# Other sea birds

(Umkomaas Northwards)

Contact CROW

031 462 1127 (o/h)

031 469 0583 (o/h)

083 212 5281 (a/h)

(South Coast)

Contact SCAR

083 246 6765

## Do

- Follow steps on Page 4.
- Follow guidance from the relevant authority.
- Take care as birds deliver a nasty bite.

**Transport of sea birds (excluding penguins) by public to CROW and SCAR is allowed.**

## Do Not

- Do not place back in the sea.
- Do not handle the bird unnecessarily.
- If the bird appears to be severely injured, do not attempt to move the animal. Wait for the rescue team to arrive.
- Do not attempt to feed the bird or give it water.
- Do not remove fishing gut or hooks from a bird.



Cape gannet



Pelican



Tern



Albatross

# Whale & dolphin entanglement

Contact KZN Sharks Board

031 566 0400

- The KZN Sharks Board are trained members of **SAWDN (South African Whale Disentanglement Network)**.
- They are the only authorised organisation permitted to disentangle animals in the sea.

**SAWDN** members are appointed by the **Department of Environmental Affairs** and are responsible for all large marine mammal disentanglement in South African waters.

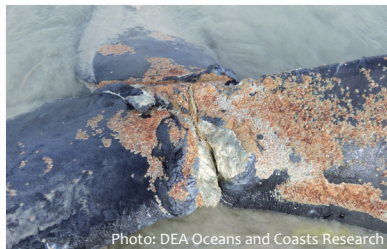


Photo: DEA Oceans and Coasts Research  
A whale's tail entangled by rope.

## Do

- Follow steps on Page 4.
- Listen to the relevant authority. They have the required experience, training and equipment to deal with these situations.

## Do Not

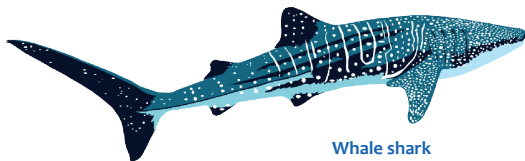
- Do not attempt the disentanglement. There are many life threatening hazards to you.

# Whale sharks

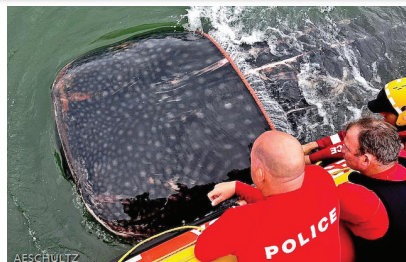
Contact KZN Sharks Board

031 566 0400

Successful rescue of these animals relies on a rapid response.



Whale shark



A whale shark rescue after beaching on a sandbank.

# Be responsible on our coast

Our beaches and rocky shores are special places that can provide opportunities for enjoyment and discovery for everyone. They are also home to many special plants and animals that can be easily harmed. Here are some tips to ensure that your visit to the coast is enjoyable, safe and responsible:

1. Dispose of your waste responsibly - if possible, recycle it.
2. Try not to disturb the little animals living on the rocky shores or on the sandy beaches. Be careful where you walk, you may be crushing an animal.
3. If you want to fish or collect invertebrates, make sure that you have the correct permits and harvest only the bag limits within the regulations.
4. Use demarcated access paths onto the beach and don't trample sensitive dune plants.
5. When close to the water, never turn your back to the sea and keep a careful lookout for waves.
6. If you see poaching or any illegal activities taking place, report them to the relevant authorities.

To learn more about the animals and plants that live in this area, look out for useful local guide books.

Explore, enjoy,  
learn and take  
care -  
we are  
privileged to  
have  
such a  
magnificent  
coast!



Photo: Ailsa Sye

# Contact us



All listed organisations are members of the  
**KZN Marine Stranding Network.**

Organisation	Contact Number	Stranded Animals
uShaka Sea World	031 328 8222 (o/h) 031 328 8060 (a/h)	All marine animals (dolphins, whales, seals, turtles, penguins, seabirds)
KZN Sharks Board	031 566 0400	Whale and dolphin entanglements Whale sharks
CROW Centre for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife	031 462 1127 (o/h) 031 469 0583 (o/h) 083 212 5281 (a/h)	Sea Birds excluding penguins

**“No person shall, except on the authority of a permit: kill, or attempt to kill, fish for or harass; feed, keep or control; be in possession of any part of, or a product made from; dolphins, whales, turtles, whale sharks, penguins and seals.”**

Excerpt from the Marine Living Resources Act.



Bottlenose dolphin