



Two dolphins retrieved in Gulf, six to go

Swept out of aquarium by Katrina, they might not be able to survive in wild

MSNBC News Services

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JACKSON, Miss. - Two anemic dolphins that were swept from their aquarium tanks into the Gulf of Mexico by Hurricane Katrina were retrieved Thursday, but six others remained at sea.

The two retrieved dolphins were captured after scientists in a boat coaxed the trained animals into sliding onto mats.

The dolphins had cuts and appeared to be the worst injured of the eight, Jeff Foster, a marine specialist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. They were immediately moved to a hotel swimming pool.

Trainers and scientists hope to catch more of the dolphins on Saturday, but said that may be tougher because the dolphins "get pretty wise to our tricks," Foster said. Nets are also an option, a NOAA spokeswoman said.

The marine mammals had spent much of their lives in captivity at the Marine Life Oceanarium in Gulfport. After Katrina's storm surge washed them away, they were spotted Saturday swimming off Gulfport by NOAA scientists conducting an aerial damage survey.

Survival in wild questioned

Scientists worried that the dolphins might not have the instincts to avoid predators and boat traffic.

The dolphins' home had been a 30-foot high tank. The Marine Life Oceanarium was destroyed by Katrina.

Moby Solangi, the aquarium's owner, said the staff had been worried that the dolphins had died. "We are just thrilled that they have stayed together during the past couple of weeks," Solangi said.

Solangi added that the two retrieved dolphins were 30-year-old Jackie and her 16-year-old offspring, Toni.

The six others, including Jackie's 5-year-old son, Elijah, will be retrieved as soon as the U.S. Navy provides salt water tanks to house them, said Connie Barclay, a spokeswoman for NOAA's fisheries division.

She said Jackie and Toni were retrieved even though the tanks were not on hand because tests showed they were anemic and in need of immediate help.

Move from rafts to van to pool

Teams of oceanographers and Coast Guard officers used orange rafts equipped with mattresses to transport them to shore where an air-conditioned van made the short trip to temporary quarters in the swimming pool.

They will then be transported to other aquariums in the country when the salt-water tanks arrive.

Because they lived in captivity and do not know how to forage for food, they are being fed several times a day from a boat by oceanarium workers.

Of 26 sea lions kept at the aquarium, five are dead, one is missing and the other 20 have gone to other aquariums, mostly in Florida. A seal is also missing.

The Associated Press and Reuters contributed to this report.

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