

Russian Villagers Rescue Beached Beluga Whales

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Social Media

Russian villagers in the country's Far East region of Magadan have come to the rescue of two beluga whales that were stranded on shore, local media [reported](#) Tuesday.

The two whales had been hunting herring, their usual prey, in Gizhigin Bay when the tide receded, trapping them in shallow waters and eventually leaving them on a dry beach where they caught locals' attention, MagadanMedia reported.

A group of 17 adults and children from the village of Topolovka covered the stranded cetaceans in wet cloths and poured water on them to help them stay alive.

Once the tide finally returned eight hours later at about 10 p.m., the belugas were able to swim back into the Sea of Okhotsk. Locals told MagadanMedia that other belugas had been waiting in nearby waters for their stranded comrades.

Local officials told MagadanMedia that the rescue took place about two weeks ago and that the

villagers rally to help stranded whales almost every June, when herring swim to Gizhiginskaya Bay for their spawning period.

Conservation experts are closely [monitoring](#) another group of stranded belugas near the Chukotka peninsula north of the Sea of Okhotsk. Since January the whales have been trapped in a small clearing surrounded by kilometers of ice in the Penkigngey Bay.

Such things are quite common in the area, for belugas sometimes go hunting into long bays before the ice sets, experts [told](#) the state-run TASS news agency. After winter ice covers the sea, they have to wait until summer before they can escape.

The World Wildlife Fund says belugas [play](#) a critical role in Arctic ecosystems and are vulnerable to climate change due to their dependence on sea ice. In Russia, belugas and other whales also risk capture to be sold to oceanariums or kept in so-called “whale prisons.”

Related article: [Russia Starts Freeing Captive Belugas From ‘Whale Prison,’ Reports Say](#)

After images from a Russian “whale prison” near the Sea of Japan port of Nakhodka sparked international and domestic outrage, the State Duma temporarily [banned](#) the capture of orcas and belugas until conditions in oceanariums were drastically reformed.

Although more than 100,00 Russians in 2019 [signed](#) a petition calling for a permanent ban on whale capture, the government deemed this “unnecessary” and opted for a temporary ban instead.

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