

REHABILITATION OF CETACEANS

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Every year hundreds of marine mammals strand along the shores of the United States. In the Gulf of Mexico, stranded animals are largely made up of cetaceans, particularly the Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphin and the Rough-toothed Dolphin. Rehabilitation of these animals is an extremely labor intensive act. Multiple diagnostics must be run to help determine the cause of the animal's illness. Other factors, like space availability, man power, and money also contribute to the overall ability for a facility to rehabilitate a cetacean. If a park has a permanent collection of cetaceans, then a strict quarantine must be set up and enforced by the veterinarian so as not to cross contaminate the in-house population. In many cases, the animal succumbs to his or her illness and a detailed necropsy must be performed. Collected samples are invaluable. Some rehabilitated animals cannot go back into the wild and then must be placed in a permanent facility; however, the ultimate goal is for the animal to be released back into the wild. The goal of this lecture is to give the student an understanding of the time, energy, and resources needed to care for an animal once it is found on the beach to the time it is released back into the wild. Certain common diseases seen in rehabilitation of cetaceans will also be discussed.