



CLEARWATER MARINE AQUARIUM®

A New Year's Gift: Second Right Whale Calf Sighted off Georgia Coast

Aerial survey team with Clearwater Marine Aquarium spotted the second mother-calf pair

ST. SIMON'S ISLAND, Ga. (December 31, 2019) – On Monday, December 30 at 3:55 p.m., an aerial survey team with Clearwater Marine Aquarium (CMA) identified the second right whale calf/mom pair off the coast of Georgia near St. Simon's Island. Exactly two weeks after the same team identified the season's first mom/calf pair, the sighting is a significant indicator of hope for one of the world's most endangered species.

"During our sighting the mother was lingering deep enough below the surface of the ocean that we were initially unaware if this was a new mother/calf pair or one that has already been documented this season," said Melanie White, North Atlantic Right Whale Conservation Project Manager and Research Biologist with Clearwater Marine Aquarium. "Once mom was finally at the surface we were able to use the photographs we were taking to identify the individual, and the New England Aquarium confirmed, it was Catalog #1612; a second mom for the season!"

Today researchers estimate there are just over 400 North Atlantic right whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*) left in the population, with fewer than 100 breeding females left. Calving grounds off the coasts of northeast Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina have been designated Critical Habitat Areas to help protect the species.

"The CMA Right Whale Conservation Program works hand-in-hand with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, NOAA, and FWC to actively monitor right whales during calving season," said Dr. James Powell, VP Research and Conservation with Clearwater Marine Aquarium. "Through aerial surveys we work together to protect the species." Powell continued, "Recovery had been slow and steady up until a few years ago, but most recent population models show that the numbers are declining again for various reasons including a slow reproduction rate, threats from entanglement in fishing gear, collisions with large ships, and possibly other factors not yet identified."

The right whale is a federally-protected endangered species under the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Clearwater Marine Aquarium aerial survey teams work with NOAA, Georgia DNR, and FWC to mitigate ship collisions and document reproductive rates, provide scientific data to marine decision makers on conserving the species, assist efforts to disentangle whales from fishing gear, locate carcasses for recovery and necropsies, and assist with locating whales for genetic sampling and satellite tagging.

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About Clearwater Marine Aquarium:

Clearwater Marine Aquarium (CMA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit working marine rescue center dedicated to inspiring the human spirit through leadership in education, research, rescue, rehabilitation and release. CMA is home to rescued dolphins, sea turtles, river otters, stingrays, nurse sharks and more. Winter the dolphin's story of survival, after an injury that caused her to lose her tail, has impacted millions of people around the world. Major motion picture *Dolphin Tale* (2011) features Winter's story and its sequel *Dolphin Tale 2* (2014) features the incredible story of Hope, a young resident dolphin of CMA. Clearwater Marine Aquarium also conducts important global research focused on protecting manatees, right whales and sea turtles. The mission and potential to change people's lives differentiates Clearwater Marine Aquarium from any other aquarium in the world.

WE BELIEVE in preserving our marine life and environment while inspiring the human spirit through leadership in the education, research, rescue, rehabilitation, and release.