

Stuff

Funky Monkey the orca dodges disaster after underestimating growing girth

Denise Piper 16:08, Oct 07 2020

[Video]

Pickle the orca frolics with her family

Pickle, who has half a dorsal fin and is Funky Monkey's sister, has been spotted frolicking in the Hauraki Gulf. Video first published June 2018.

A bit of human intervention has helped [an orca](#) avoid [getting hurt](#), after he underestimated his size while swimming over a shallow sand bank in Northland.

Funky Monkey, a male orca about 30 years old, was stranded for about 30 minutes near Marsden Point in Whangārei Harbour on Tuesday.

Orca Research Trust helped Funky Monkey keep cool by pouring buckets of water over him, until the tide came in enough for him to free himself, researcher Dr Ingrid Visser said.



ORCA RESEARCH TRUST

Funky Monkey was able to propel himself off the sandbank about 30 minutes of rising tide.

“He’s very lucky that we were there so that we were able to keep him wet. There have been plenty of instances where they’ve been stranded and not had help and they’ve got incredibly sunburnt or died.”

Visser said Funky Monkey appeared to know the tide was coming in and was very calm throughout the ordeal.



ORCA RESEARCH TRUST

Dr Ingrid Visser says Funky Monkey, with his unusual dorsal fin, was lucky to not be seriously hurt.

After about 30 minutes, his mother and [younger sister Pickle](#) came to check on him, giving him motivation to swim off.

Once in deeper water, he was able to join his family and was spotted eating a stingray.

Funky Monkey has a distinctive divot in the side of his dorsal fin from a spinal deformity, likely caused by a boat strike, Visser said.



DENISE PIPER/STUFF

Orca are often spotted around Whangārei Harbour but the area also has a high boat strike rate, Dr Ingrid Visser says. (File photo)

But this spinal deformity is not expected to be what caused the stranding, as other orca with the same deformity have never stranded before.

Visser expected the stranding was due to Funky Monkey growing into a healthy, adult male size without entirely realising.

“All his life he’s been able to go into these areas because he hasn’t grown into the full-blown size – where he used to be able to travel at these tides, he’s now not able to.”

Visser encouraged people who see orca while on or near the water to contact the Orca Research Trust, so the team can help them avoid disaster again.

The trust can be contacted on 0800 SEE ORCA (0800 733 6722).

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<https://www.stuff.co.nz/environment/300126551/funky-monkey-the-orca-dodges-disaster-after-underestimating-growing-girth>

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<https://archive.ph/QEIII>