



NOAA NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
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Veterinary Technician Honored for Marine Mammal Rescue and Care

A veterinary technician who has cared for hundreds of marine mammals and sea turtles stranded in Virginia has been honored by NOAA Fisheries Service's Northeast Region Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Stranding Network with its prestigious Award of Excellence.

Wendy Walton received an individual Award of Excellence for her lifetime achievements in marine mammal rescue and animal care at the annual Northeast Region Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Stranding Network conference May 6-9 in Bar Harbor, Maine. A group award was also presented to the Riverhead Foundation for Marine Research and Preservation of Long Island, New York for its work with stranded humpback whales. The two awards are named in honor of marine mammal researcher David St. Aubin.

Walton recently served as the Live Animal Care Coordinator at the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center in Virginia Beach and has participated in the marine mammal and sea turtle stranding network for over 20 years. Walton cared for hundreds of animals during her time in the network. She remains affiliated with the Aquarium, where she became a volunteer in the early 1990s and was later hired to care for stranded seals, sea turtles and cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises).

"Wendy's enthusiasm, passion and dedication for the animals she treated is evident to anyone who knows her," says Mendy Garron, NOAA Fisheries Service's Northeast Region Marine Mammal Stranding Coordinator. "Walton's work has contributed to newly developed protocols in the care and release of stranded pinniped species in Virginia waters." Pinnipeds include seals and sea lions.

"Pinniped species are moving south in their distribution. Over the last ten years, Virginia has seen an increase in pinniped strandings on their shores and Wendy has worked with many biologists in developing appropriate treatment, transport and release plans for these species, as well as other marine mammal species," says Garron. "This award recognizes Wendy's dedication and contributions to the Regional and National Marine Mammal Stranding Network."

Susan Barco, stranding response coordinator and senior scientist at the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center, echoed Garron's remarks. "Wendy is one of the most dedicated stranding responders I have ever met. She has an intuitive sense about the right way to handle and treat marine mammals and sea turtles. While we miss her as a full-time employee, we are pleased we are still working with her and benefitting from her experience and knowledge."

The Northeast Regional Marine Mammal Stranding Program of NOAA Fisheries Service annually presents two Awards of Excellence in memory of David St. Aubin, a long-standing researcher whose work benefited the Marine Mammal Stranding Network through scientific excellence.

St. Aubin grew up in Hudson, Ontario and attended the University of Guelph, where he earned master and Ph.D. degrees. He began his research career at the Arctic Biological Station of Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans studying phytoplankton, but his interests soon moved to seals and whales. He spent 30 summers in the Arctic doing research on beluga whales, narwhals and sea lions, and made significant contributions to understanding what keeps marine mammals healthy. St. Aubin was director of research and veterinary services at Connecticut's Mystic Aquarium at the time of his death in 2002.

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Related links:

Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Stranding Network:

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/health/networks.htm#northeast>

Northeast Region Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Stranding and Disentanglement Program:

http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/stranding/

Strandings: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/strandings.htm>

Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center: <http://www.virginiaaquarium.com>