



# ATLANTIC MARINE CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Promoting Marine Conservation Through Action

SPRING 2019 NEWSLETTER



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Atlantic Marine Conservation Society  
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## TEAM

### Founder and Chief Scientist

Robert A. DiGiovanni, Jr.

### Necropsy Program Coordinator

Kimberly Durham

### Field Biologist and Volunteer Coordinator

Hannah Winslow

### Research Associate and Field Biologist

Allison DePerte

### Field Biologist and Education Coordinator

Nicole Carone

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Thomas Telesca, Chair and President

Lori Pack, Secretary and Vice President

Carolynn Burke, Treasurer

Barbara Becker

Anthony Basile





## FROM OUR CHIEF SCIENTIST ROBERT A. DIGIOVANNI, JR.

When we first set out on this journey, we would never have imagined that we would be faced with amazing challenges while responding to over 350 animals in two years. This incredible number could have been enough to break a team, but the dedication of our volunteers, staff, board of directors and local towns and municipalities enabled us to grow our response network.

Large whale strandings have increased from an average of one per year more than a decade ago to now one per month. In response, we've built teams of trained individuals and fostered partnerships from Maine to New Jersey. The increase in humpback, minke and North Atlantic right whale strandings prompted NOAA Fisheries to declare an unusual mortality event for each of these species.

Atlantic Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) was started in response to the need for building capacity for stranding investigations and to share information in New York and throughout our region. Thanks to your support, we have been able to meet the increasing challenges that would have devastated the historic capacity in the area.

All too often we do not think of our seas until it is summer. We tend to ignore them, treating it like a vacation rental. We expect the ocean to be there when we want it and expect it to be pristine. However, our seas are in trouble. We need to care about our marine environment during these times of trouble, too. We need to invest in it to understand what the years of neglect have done to the ecosystem. Let's think about how we view our seas. They are not ours alone, but together we can promote marine conservation and make a positive impact for generations to come.



# COMMUNITY ACTION UPDATE

After observing an examination by AMCS of a leatherback sea turtle in summer 2018, a student at Steinway Intermediate School's William Shakespeare Academy in Astoria, Queens named Alexandria was surprised to learn plastic had been found in the animal. Thinking of how much plastic she used in her daily life and how much was used at her school, she petitioned to stop using plastic straws in the lunchroom. The vice principal agreed to get her classmates involved in the discussion, so they organized a special assembly with AMCS.

In November 2018, AMCS educators Allison DePerte and Nicole Carone showed the documentary, STRAWS, and led a passionate discussion with the William Shakespeare Academy students about the need to protect our marine environment. At the end, students were planning beach cleanups and talking about how to reduce single-use plastic consumption by opting for reusables like water bottles and grocery bags. At the students' overwhelming request, the school has agreed to stop purchasing plastic straws!

This type of initiative brought forth by young people is at the heart of AMCS's mission and helps to bolster our staff and volunteers to continue reaching out to communities about the marine debris problem and actions needed to rectify it.

**Interested in having AMCS come to your school?  
Contact us at [education@amseas.org](mailto:education@amseas.org)**





## COMMUNITY ACTION UPDATE

AMCS took part in **20 beach cleanups** from August 2018 to January 2019 across New York State, including Queens, Staten Island, and the towns of Hempstead, Babylon, Smithtown, Riverhead, Southampton, and East Hampton. Thanks to your help, **we picked up a total of 1,196 pounds of marine debris spanning 22+ miles** of beaches. The top 3 types of marine debris found in our cleanups were plastic fragments, straws/stirrers, and food wrappers.

AMCS was also part of **63 education events** between August 2018 and January 2019. That's at least two events per week! These events included **Connect Kids to Parks**, interactive discussions with the public, private events at schools, **STRAWS** documentary screenings, and fairs.

Thanks to the Connect Kids to Parks grant, we are continuing our partnership with **Hallock State Park Preserve** and Orient Beach State Park to offer free community

presentations. Our educators discuss marine animals around Long Island, the threats they face in our waters, and how young people can make small behavior changes that will have positive effects on the environment. Participants also walk the beach to collect marine debris and monitor the beaches for injured wildlife.

During one of the beach monitoring events at Hallock State Park Preserve in November 2018, a cold stunned Kemp's ridley sea turtle was found and immediately transferred to the Riverhead Foundation for Marine Research and Preservation. AMCS conducted a necropsy shortly after. These efforts are critical to saving protected species and removing harmful debris from their environment.



Join us for our next event!  
[amseas.org/events](https://amseas.org/events)



# STRANDING UPDATE

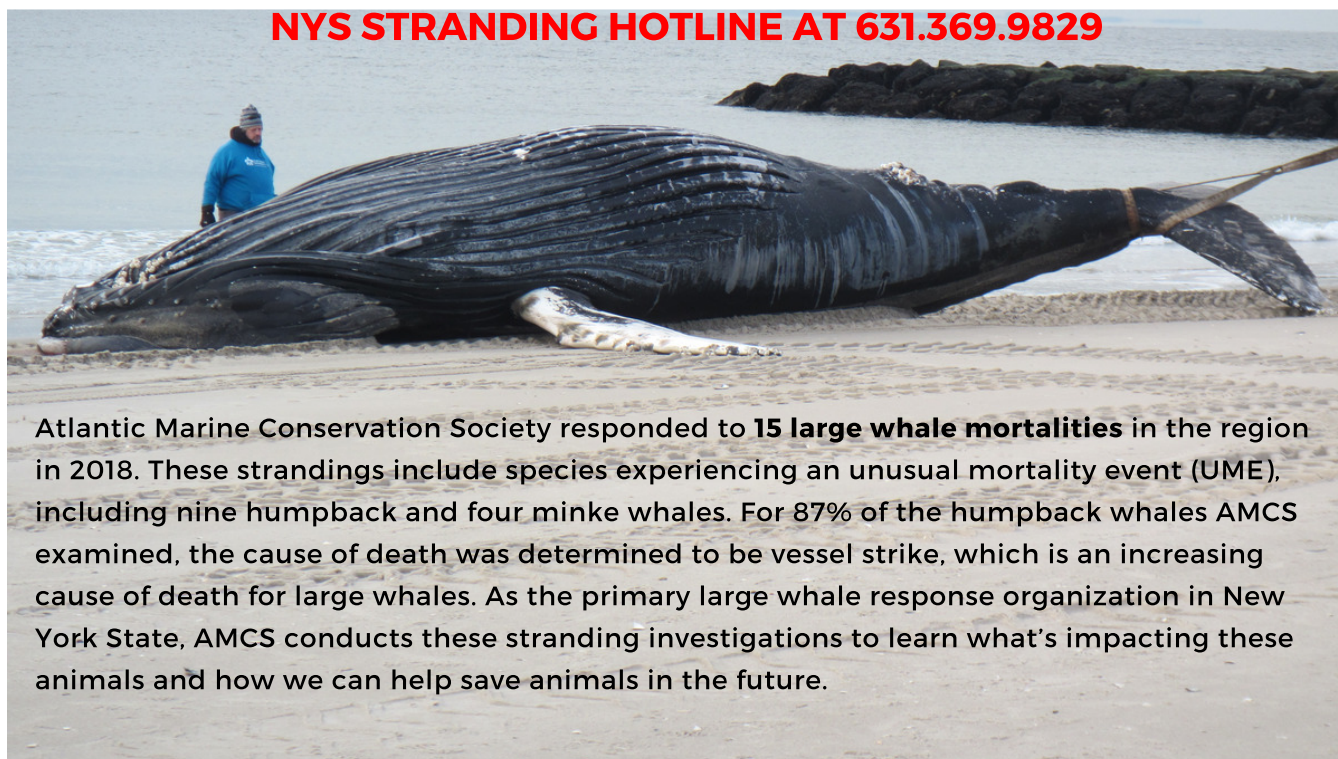
**43 sea turtles were recovered from Long Island shores** during the 2018 cold stun sea turtle season by New York State response organizations and the public. The season began on November 12, 2018 with the recovery of a live cold stunned Atlantic green sea turtle from Fire Island. During the next six weeks, **24 Kemp's ridley, 13 loggerhead and 6 Atlantic green sea turtles were recovered.** Nearly 80% of these washed ashore on Long Island Sound beaches.

Tragically, the frigid temperatures took their toll during the months of November and December with a **77% mortality rate** documented. AMCS conducted necropsies on 38 of these 43 sea turtles. Mortality examinations conducted by AMCS staff and volunteers have provided an invaluable opportunity for anatomical studies as well as life history and diet analysis. Special thanks go out to all the individuals who attended our sea turtle training presentations and beach walks.



**IF YOU FIND A SICK OR INJURED MARINE ANIMAL, CONTACT THE**

**NYS STRANDING HOTLINE AT 631.369.9829**



Atlantic Marine Conservation Society responded to **15 large whale mortalities** in the region in 2018. These strandings include species experiencing an unusual mortality event (UME), including nine humpback and four minke whales. For 87% of the humpback whales AMCS examined, the cause of death was determined to be vessel strike, which is an increasing cause of death for large whales. As the primary large whale response organization in New York State, AMCS conducts these stranding investigations to learn what's impacting these animals and how we can help save animals in the future.



# 2018 LARGE WHALE STRANDING SUMMARY

SPECIES	STRANDING DATE	LOCATION	CAUSE OF DEATH*
1. Humpback whale	February 12	Breezy Point, NY	Vessel strike
2. Humpback whale	May 5	Sandy Hook, NJ	Vessel strike
3. Sperm whale	May 7	Gardiner's Island, NY	Undetermined
4. Humpback whale	May 8	Long Beach, NY	Vessel strike
5. Humpback whale	May 27	Point O' Woods, Fire Island, NY	Vessel strike
6. Humpback whale	June 1	Breezy Point, NY	Vessel strike
7. Humpback whale	June 14	Atlantic Beach, NY	Vessel strike
8. Humpback whale	July 26	Amagansett, NY	Fisheries interaction
9. Minke whale	July 30	Cherry Grove, Fire Island, NY	Analysis ongoing
10. Minke whale	August 8	East Quogue, NY	Undetermined
11. Humpback whale	August 28	Kismet, Fire Island, NY	Vessel strike
12. Unknown species	September 19	Jamaica Bay, Brooklyn, NY	Undetermined
13. Minke whale	September 24	Amagansett, NY	Undetermined
14. Unknown species	September 26	East Hampton, NY	Undetermined
15. Minke whale	December 21	Oyster Bay, NY	Infectious disease

AMCS is responsible for responding to all large whales that wash up on our shores. Part of our stranding investigations involve collecting samples and sending them to a pathologist for further examination.

\*All causes of death are preliminary. Pathology reports may take several months to come back.

**As a nonprofit organization, we rely on public support to carry out these investigations. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to AMCS.**





## PARTNERSHIPS & RESEARCH

Our cover star for this newsletter is Tammie, a loggerhead sea turtle that was rescued by **US Coast Guard Cutter Lawrence Lawson** off the coast of Cape May, New Jersey. Tammie was found with propeller cuts on her carapace and was brought to **Sea Turtle Recovery (STR)** for rehabilitation. AMCS was thrilled to work with STR and **Western Connecticut State University's Finding Our Way** program to provide Tammie with a satellite tag, making her the first sea turtle rehabilitated by STR to receive one! These tags provide information about post-rehabilitation behavior and travel patterns and are an important research tool in conservation efforts. The Finding Our Way program is a year-long, hands-on learning program that gets students involved in the environmental sciences in their

surroundings and fosters lifelong interest in protecting our environment.

We joined STR staff, volunteers and an enthusiastic crowd for the release of Tammie and three other sea turtles in September 2018.

Partnerships are essential to our work. When we envisioned the development of a Specially Trained Animal Response Team (START), we hoped the need for this type of support would not be prevalent. Since its inception, the team has been working to help network members and collaborating with **New York Department of Environmental Conservation** and **NOAA Fisheries** to develop response plans to unusual stranding events. The need for this community approach to addressing these events is apparent as these unusual events are becoming more common.





# PARTNERSHIPS & RESEARCH

continued

AMCS Research Permit #20294

In November 2018, our team completed an aerial survey of seal haul out sites around Long Island, Connecticut and Rhode Island in support of the Northeast US Pinniped Unusual Mortality Event (UME) investigation. More than 900 harbor and grey seals were observed in Moriches Bay, Shinnecock Bay, Montauk, Fisher's Island, Little Gull Island, Block Island and Narragansett Bay. This survey provided a picture of harbor and grey seal migrations and the population status in light of more than 1,400 animals that were responded to in the region since July 2018.

Continuing our work to understand the movements and health of these populations, AMCS chief scientist Robert A. DiGiovanni, Jr. recently deployed two satellite tags on harbor seals with **Marine Mammals of Maine** and **Mystic Aquarium's Animal Rescue Clinic**.

AMCS is working on health assessment studies on grey seals in the northeast region in collaboration with researchers

through the **Northwest Atlantic Seal Research Consortium**, including **Tufts University**, **Marine Mammals of Maine**, **Northeast Fisheries Science Center**, **University of Connecticut**, and **Pacific Marine Mammal Center**. These studies support the **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program**. Funding by the **National Marine Sanctuary Foundation** will enable DiGiovanni to deploy satellite tags on these animals to gain insight into how they use the marine habitat, in particular the **Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary**. These tags will provide position, water temperature, haul out behavior and dive data for the tagged animals.

**For more information about the National Marine Sanctuary projects, visit [marinesanctuary.org](http://marinesanctuary.org)**

During January 2019, the research team led by AMCS Chief Scientist Robert DiGiovanni was able to deploy 11 tags on seals at three different sites in the southeast Gulf of Maine.



# WHAT'S NEXT

AMCS is honored to have been awarded a grant through the **John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program**. Work on our project, titled “**Mortality and Entanglement Investigations in New York and the Greater Atlantic Region: A Collaborative Response and Training Initiative to Increasingly Challenging Issues**,” will enable us to continue to respond to large whale strandings while creating a training program for partners in the Greater Atlantic Region, enhancing mortality investigations from Maine through Delaware.

Community involvement is critical to AMCS's mission of promoting marine conservation through action. In the coming months, we are excited to be working with new partners on educational opportunities, including presentations, beach cleanup and monitoring events, and installing informational signage at waterfront locations about safe marine life viewing and the importance of proper reporting procedures for injured or deceased marine mammals and sea turtles.

## THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS AND SPONSORS



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