

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Immediate Release October 5, 1973

Carroll 202/343-5634

## AGENCY EFFORTS ARE PRAISED IN RESCUE OF BABY PIGMY SPERM WHALE

Assistant Secretary of the Interior Nathaniel P. Reed today commended the cooperative efforts of the Mississippi Conservation Commission, the Commerce Department's National Marine Fisheries Service and Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service in rescuing a baby pigmy sperm whale that beached itself on the Mississippi Gulf Coast near Biloxi Tuesday.

The young whale, one of the few of its kind ever sighted in North America, is being cared for at Marine Life, a private tourist attraction in Gulfport, Miss. Its condition and survival chances are described as good.

The animal, which is 4-1/2 feet long and weighs 65 pounds, is being fed a varied diet that includes fish fillets, squid, cod liver oil, vitamins, egg yolks, animal fats, and whipped cream.

According to records, the last baby pigmy whale in captivity lived 21 days at the New York Aquarium last year. Until 1956, there were records of only four sightings in North America, although the species is widely distributed in temperate and tropical waters.

The young whale was discovered by Mississippi Conservation Commission inspector Tom Welch who notified special agents Bob Wright of the Fish and Wildlife Service and Bill Dickinson of the National Marine Fisheries Service. The Federal agencies are charged with protection of marine mammals.

"We knew this was not an ordinary whale because the blowhole appeared to be on the left side of the head," Wright said. Positive identification was made by scientists of the New York Aquarium and Marine Land of the Pacific in Los Angeles.

Wright said that the whale suffered minor sand abrasions and a laceration from its beaching experience. The animal now is being held in a large tank and is responding well to the people attending it, Wright indicated.

The Federal Government will retain "ownership" of the whale until a decision is made on a permanent home. Pigmy sperm whales, which have a superficial resemblance to sharks, grow to 9 to 13 feet in length as adults.