

Inspired Life

Seal is found wandering streets of New Haven, becomes local celebrity

Spotted five miles from the water, the pup was taken to an aquarium for rehab and eventual release.

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A baby seal was found in the middle of a street in downtown New Haven, Connecticut, on Feb. 16. (Officer Caitlin Zerella)



By [Sydney Page](#)

It was just before the lunch rush at an oyster bar in New Haven, Connecticut, when a wild seal appeared on land, seemingly searching for a snack at the waterside establishment.

Donna Domek was out for her morning walk on Feb. 15, when she spotted the baby seal outside Shell & Bones Oyster Bar and Grill on New Haven Harbor.

“It was the most amazing thing,” she said. “I have never seen anything like it.”



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Donna Domek spotted the gray seal on her morning walk. (Donna Domek)

Seals typically eat fish and shellfish, and their sense of smell on land is acute.

“He was onto something,” said Francesca Battaglia, an animal rescue technician at Mystic Aquarium in Mystic, Connecticut. Her team was notified about the seal spotting, and they went to the scene.

“Our first responders relocated him to a beach, so he was away from the hustle and bustle, and continued to monitor him,” said Battaglia, adding that they identified the animal as a baby male gray seal, about 6 or 7 weeks old.

But soon enough, the seal made his way out of the water again. The next day, he scooped all the way to downtown New Haven, about five miles from where he was dropped off by rescuers in the water. Locals, baffled by the sight of him, took photos and called police.

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Police at first weren’t sure whether the photos were fake.

“I started getting pictures, and I thought they were AI-generated,” said Christian Bruckhart, a spokesperson for the New Haven Police Department. “It’s not something we encounter on a daily basis.”

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encounter on a daily basis.

Fortunately for the stray seal, a police officer happened to locate the creature galumphing into oncoming traffic, and he swiftly moved the seal to safety at the side of the road.



Officer Tyler Camp rescued the seal from the middle of the road. (Officer Caitlin Zerella)

Officer Tyler Camp waited with the seal for two hours in the icy rain while Mystic Aquarium volunteers and officials from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection came to assist with the rescue effort.

“We were determined to get the seal some help,” Bruckhart said. “We have a lot of animal lovers in the department, so we were just trying to make sure he was okay.”

Rescuers loaded the seal into a vehicle and transported him to Mystic Aquarium to be monitored. They decided he was not safe on his own.

A baby seal was found alone on a street in downtown New Haven, Conn., on Feb. 16. (Video: Caitlin Zerella)

“It seemed he wasn’t figuring out his way, and it was better to collect him for rehab,” Battaglia said.

Bruckhart said officials don’t know what compelled the seal to take a trip downtown, but he has his suspicions.

“New Haven is known for its clam pizza,” he said.

Marine biologists at Mystic Aquarium have their own theory. Battaglia explained it was recently “pupping season” in the region, the most common time for seal births. The pups wean off their mother’s milk after a few weeks and can sometimes wander off when they are resting on beaches or rocky shores.

“They really do have to figure out everything on their own, and they do become confused and lost like this little guy,” she said. “Everything is new to them.”





When volunteers rescued him, the seal was 28 pounds. (Mystic Aquarium)

Still, a baby seal showing up at an oyster bar, or on downtown streets, is not common.

“He probably was just trying to find a quiet, safe place and ended up finding the complete opposite in the city,” Battaglia said. “It caught people by surprise. The fact that they found a seal in a busy area where seals normally aren’t.”

When volunteers rescued the seal, he was underweight and dehydrated.

“It’s not unusual for these animals, when they first go out on their own, away from mom, to lose a bit of weight as they’re learning to catch fish and fend for themselves,” Battaglia said.

She and her colleagues decided the best course of action was to keep the seal — who does not yet have a name — at the aquarium and release him into the wild when he is stronger.



Officer Christian Bruckhart of the New Haven Police Department visited the seal at the aquarium on Tuesday. He brought staff pizza from three well-known restaurants. From left, Francesca Battaglia, Bruckhart, Sarah Callan and Kimberly Hentz. (Mystic Aquarium)

“We want to get him up at least 10 to 20 more pounds before we’re going to be comfortable with releasing him,” Battaglia said, noting that the seal weighed 28 pounds when he first came in.

The seal is in “fish school,” meaning he is learning how to

mimic the movement of fish to catch them. “We’re trying to get his natural instincts to kick in,” Battaglia said.



Christian Bruckhart visits the seal. (Christian Bruckhart)

While the seal continues to gain his strength, locals are reveling in his unexpected appearance. James Gross, who lives in front of the oyster bar, said the seal has become a New Haven celebrity.

“It’s made quite the splash in the neighborhood,” he said.

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