

Experts guide whales to safety

[Mike Dinsdale](#) | 15th November 2010



**Rising: Male orca Nibble was snapped on Saturday.
PICTURE/Orca Research Trust Research Assistant Leonie
Mahlke Photo / Orca Research Trust Research Assistant
Leonie Mahlke**

A pod of about 50 pilot whales started heading to shore and a possible stranding on Whangarei's coast when whale rescuers escorted the animals out to sea yesterday.

Marine mammal expert Ingrid Visser was checking to see whether a pod of 50 pilot whales off Whangarei's East Coast were the same whales that stranded in Doubtless Bay in August when they made a worrying beeline for the coast.

Dr Visser said a call came from a fishing charter boat about 8.30am yesterday that a large pod of pilot whales was heading towards the shore between Tutukaka and the Poor Knights Islands. She was keen to find out whether they were the same whales that stranded in Doubtless Bay.

About 30 minutes later Dr Visser and two volunteers Samantha Hale and Leonie Mahlke were on the water with the pod of whales and keeping a close eye on what they were doing.

"They were accompanied by about 20 pelagic bottle-nosed dolphins," Dr Visser said.

Dr Visser said the pod appeared to be heading towards the shore and a possible stranding, and the Department of Conservation was informed.

But the marine mammals turned away and Dr Visser and her team escorted them towards the Poor Knights. By 1.30pm she was sure they were heading back out to sea but stayed with them for another two hours to make sure they were okay.

There were at least three new babies in the pod, which appeared to be socialising by rolling over each other and lifting their heads out of the water to look at the humans.

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The team took more than 2000 photos and Dr Visser's orca research assistants would now examine them all to check for a match.

There have been two mass pilot whale strandings in Northland in the past three months.

On August 20, 58 pilot whales stranded on Karikari Beach, in the Far North, with 49 dying.

On September 22, 74 pilot whales stranded at Spirits Bay. Two days later rescuers trucked 24 of the surviving whales 50km south from to Rarawa Beach on Aupouri Peninsula.

If you spot an orca please give Ingrid Visser a call on 0800 SEE ORCA.