

# False killer whales sighted off Groote Eylandt as rangers set out to tag elusive dolphin species

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8 Sep 2018

A whale only by name, these marine mammals are actually an elusive species of dolphin.

The false killer whale, sighted by rangers off Groote Eylandt in the Gulf of Carpentaria on Thursday, is listed as "data deficient" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

To put it simply, there's very little information about their movements and social behaviour.



"We were out doing some marine debris collection up at North East Island ... the whales came by and they had some fun playing around the front of the boat," Tom Lawton, a biosecurity officer with the Anindilyakwa Land and Sea Rangers, said.

"The track and research that we've already done with them shows they do spend a lot of time around Groote, and further afield into Blue Mad Bay and up into Cape Shield, but yeah, it's few and far between."

Researchers are trying to learn more about the mysterious species, prompting a callout to report any sightings, including GPS, photos or video.

Within the coming months, Anindilyakwa Land and Sea Rangers will head out to sea with researchers to try and attach satellite transmitters to two dolphins.

It follows the successful tagging of two false killer whales in April, which were monitored for 10 weeks before the tags fell off.

The 12-month study, in collaboration with the Northern Territory Government and Charles Darwin University, is hoping to learn more about the species movements around Groote Eylandt.

Just last year, the first study of false killer whale movement patterns in Australian waters was published, based on satellite tracking of four whales in the Arafura and Timor seas in 2014.

## DEBRIS PUTTING MARINE LIFE AT RISK

The pod sighting was a bright spot in one of the Anindilyakwa rangers' regular trips to clean up marine debris from beaches around Groote Eylandt.

During this trip to North East Island, they collected enough debris to fill three boats.



**Photo:** Rangers collected three boat loads of marine debris on Thursday. ([Facebook: Anindilyakwa Land and Sea Rangers](#))

"Once the south-easterly winds kick in it really blows a lot of marine debris out of the Gulf and onto the beaches of Groote," Mr Lawton said.

"Plastics are really common, lots of bottles, discarded fishing waste, floats, gas bottles.

"The ghost nets are a big one, that's obviously a big concern because they can entangle a lot of fish and turtles."

One of the ghost nets had to be dug out of the sand on one beach.

"We have a lot of nesting turtles up on North East Island, so you can imagine if a turtle comes up to dig a nest and starts digging on a net, there's a chance she could become entangled or even just walking up the beach," Mr Lawton said.

"We saw some little baby turtles hatching so if they crawled over one of those there's a chance they'd get stuck."