



A whale of an achievement: the rescue of a live stranded right whale in southern Brazil.

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At 8:30am on Friday 18 July, 2003, a Southern right whale (*Eubalaena australis*) was found entering up a river channel in the lagoons and river system off Laguna, Southern Brazil. At 12am it stranded in a 2m depth muddy lagoon, about 10km from the open ocean, having fishing nets around its head. The region is a wintering ground for the species. Stranding events are rare, as well as entering upper river channels. The whale was a ~8m long female and appeared to be in very good shape. It was almost completely immersed in water. The first day we monitored her and planned the rescue. Challenges to be tackled included ebbing tide, very soft muddy lagoon bottom, a bridge in the channel to the main river which would compromise a towing boat passage, time restriction, inappropriate equipment and untrained personnel. Rescue attempts started at 10:30am the next day. The plan was to put a fire hose around the whale just behind her pectoral fins, pull her to the deeper lagoon channel and either let her find her way back to the open sea or try to 'tow' her with a towing tug. Around 4pm, after several attempts, we managed to take her from the shallows. She peacefully or tiredly went swimming driven by the towing tug through the channels, until being freed at a point some 500m from the ocean where she stayed for about 15 minutes, probably finding her way around. We couldn't tag her for a follow up, but head callosities and a grey blaze on her left side allowed for further monitoring. There was an effective combination of strong willingness of all participants, a bit of improvisation, some background and expertise, and a big cooperation from the whale. She was resighted unharmed 45 days later, 13km South of Laguna.

We would like to thank the policemen, lifeguards, fishermen, on-site volunteers, the towing boat company Laguna Navegação, our supporting organizations (Petrobras, CNPq), and specially the whale itself, for making this rescue possible.