

London's whale dies during rescue

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON - The bottlenose whale spotted swimming past the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben captivated thousands with its appearance in the River Thames. The death of the ailing animal, wounded and swaddled in blankets, brought a sad end to the saga of London's most unlikely tourist.

Around 3,000 people lined a stretch of the Thames yesterday, cheering as marine wildlife experts used a crane to haul the 20-foot-long whale onto a rusting salvage barge.

The rescue crew then faced a race against time to reach deeper waters on England's southern coast - as the whale's internal organs suffered the crippling effects of being out of the water. En route, the mammal suffered a series of convulsions and died.

"It was a brave, valiant, but ultimately tragic effort to get the whale to safety," said Leila Sadler, scientific officer at the

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

City workers had watched in disbelief Friday as the marine mammal was spotted flailing through the murky river, past some of the city's most famous landmarks. It was the first Northern bottlenose whale spotted in the Thames since records began in 1913.

"The animal suffered a series of convulsions at around 7 p.m. (2 p.m. EST) and died. It was already dehydrated, hadn't been feeding and the being out of the water would have, in effect, shriveled the animal's internal organs," Sadler said.

"It was essential to try to take the whale out to sea on the barge - but there was always the risk this would happen."

Rescue crews were heading toward Margate, on the southern English coast, where they hoped to let the whale back out to sea, when a veterinarian confirmed the death.



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Rescuers pour water over a Northern bottlenose whale after it was lifted from the River Thames onto a barge near Battersea Bridge in London yesterday.