



Local Residents Touches Manatee In Round Cove

by [William Galvin](#)

HARWICH -- Was it an apparition or did Doug Pfeffer really touch a manatee in Round Cove last week? Pfeffer said he is 100 percent certain the creature he met in the western-most cove of Pleasant Bay was a manatee.

"It's true, I touched it," Pfeffer said on Monday.

If he did touch one, it could be the northern most sighting of the warm water, southern climate herbivore recorded. Currently that record goes to a sighting in Quissett Harbor in Falmouth in August of 2006. There were two reported sightings in that harbor, and Brian VonHerzen of The Falmouth Enterprise said he swam along side that one for 15 minutes.

Pfeffer, who lives on Round Cove, said he often fishes for snappers there and was down at the landing last Wednesday assess the presence of bait, when he saw what appeared to be "a big piece of carpet" in the water. He watched it for a while and then thought it was a large dead seal.

"Then the nose moved," Pfeffer said.

Pfeffer grew up in Florida and has seen 20 to 30 manatees over the years. He observed the creature for two to three minutes, saw it turn on its side and then noticed its flipper.

The West Indian manatee, also known as a sea cow, was in a shallow area to the south side of the dock. Pfeffer said he called his wife, Janice, and asked her to bring down a camera. She also brought a head of romaine lettuce, knowing how they love lettuce and freshwater.

But Pfeffer said the creature began to move and swam out just off the front of the dock where he reached down and touched the sea cow as it meandered to the north side of the cover where sea lettuce growth is most prolific.

Pfeffer said when his wife arrived, she could see the disturbance in the water, the nose come up and a paddle as the manatee moved away.

"Absolutely, 100 percent confirmed," Pfeffer said.

Pfeffer said he also called Natural Resource Officer Thomas Leach. Leach and Dennis Murley, a teacher/naturalist from the Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, arrived within an hour of the sighting. Leach said he spent a few hours, until darkness set in, examining the waters of the cove in a boat.

The naturalist arrived with a kayak and also spent time criss-crossing the cove with hope of a sighting. But neither one was successful in spotting the creature.

Murley said there is “a strong likelihood” a manatee was in the cove. He based that assessment on both the observations Pfeffer related to him about the animal and a sighting of a manatee in the Fall River area a week ago. He also cited the report two years ago in Falmouth which he investigated. He spoke of the improbable trip of Chessie, a manatee bearing a radio tag, which was followed from Florida to Point Judith, R.I. in 1995.

“There’s always going to be some skepticism,” Murley said, until a manatee is photographed in these waters.

A few years ago, Murley said, a Rhode Island news station captured footage of a manatee in Warwick, R.I. New England Aquarium reported sightings in Rhode Island and Connecticut in recent weeks, he said.

Pfeffer, while not being probed with questions, provided descriptions strongly indicating it was a manatee. His answers along with his knowledge of the creatures from growing up in Florida are strong indicators of what he saw, Murley said. He reported seeing barnacles and green vegetation on the animal, which would not be found on a seal, he added.

The creature could have found itself in the warmer waters of Nantucket Sound and turned the corner off Monomoy Island, hit the colder ocean waters and came in one of the two inlets feeling the warmer waters of Pleasant Bay, Murley said. These creatures are not pelagic, but rather prefer river and marshland habitat containing freshwater.

There is speculation the animal was in the cove to access freshwater from springs on the wet side, Leach said. It potentially could be feeding on the sea lettuce or eelgrass.

Murley said it is getting late in the season for a manatee to be this far north. Manatees prefer water temperatures of 70 or above and cannot survive for long periods in colder waters.

Murley said a manatee can use a lot of energy trying to heat its bodies and may not have access to enough food to provide the necessary energy. That is a concern, he said.

As part of his job with the Audubon Society, Murley said, he chases down reports of rare sightings in this area. He said he has never seen a manatee in the wild, though he was in Quissett Harbor the day after the sighting in 2006. He has also been to Florida seeking the “Holy Grail of mammals,” but still has not seen one.

It would be a wonderful vindication to get a photo of one in these waters and put the doubt to rest, Murley said. They are recognized as a species of Buzzard Bay through earlier sightings, he said, and now it can be assumed with this sighting they can be considered a species of the Gulf of Maine.

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