

**BBC**

**THE ANIMALS WHOSE LIVES RELY ON THE NIGHT SKY**

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# Sky at Night

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# Earth welcomes 'stranded' space duo

The pair unexpectedly spent nine months longer than intended on the ISS

**Astronauts Suni Williams** and Butch Wilmore have finally returned to Earth after their eight-day visit to the International Space Station turned into a nine-month stay.

The pair of veteran astronauts arrived at the ISS in June 2024 while conducting the first test crewed flight of Boeing's Starliner spacecraft. The original plan was to return on the same vehicle, but thruster problems meant it was unsafe to do so. While the pair could have returned to Earth on another spacecraft before now if there had been an emergency, NASA decided it would be less disruptive to simply integrate them into the ISS's crew until they could reshuffle the astronaut rotation to allow them to come home.

They returned to Earth on a SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule, splashing down just off the coast of Florida on 18 March at 17:57 EDT. They were met not just by the recovery crew, but also by a pod of dolphins who had come to investigate – a remarkable welcome home from planet Earth after a long trip away.

[www.nasa.gov](http://www.nasa.gov)



▲ Both astronauts were in good spirits after their Crew Dragon Freedom capsule splashed down off Florida's west coast

▼ Curious dolphins surrounded the capsule before it was hauled up onto SpaceX recovery vessel Megan

