



Contact: Shelley Dawicki
508-495-2378
Shelley.Dawicki@noaa.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 29, 2009
NR09.03

Turtle Travels: From Woods Hole to Jekyll Island, Georgia

Dory, Boo Boo and Godzilla are not typical names for patients being treated for pneumonia and exposure to cold water, but these three are not typical patients. They are endangered sea turtles, and after spending months at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium recovering after stranding on Cape Cod beaches over the past two winters, they are heading south to be released in the warm waters off Jekyll Island, Georgia.

“Most turtles head south before the weather turns cool in the fall, but almost every year some stragglers are ‘cold-stunned’ or hypothermic when the water temperatures fall in late October and November and they drift ashore on Cape beaches,” said Rachel Metz-Leland, senior aquarist at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium, part of NOAA’s Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC)’s laboratory in Woods Hole. “They will die if they don’t receive proper care to get them back into good health.”

Boo Boo, a juvenile Kemp’s Ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*) turtle, was found stranded at North Ryder Beach in Truro, Mass. on November 28, 2007. Dory, also a juvenile Kemp’s Ridley, was found a few days later on December 1 at Great Island Gut in Truro. Godzilla, a sub-adult loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), was found on November 29, 2008 at North Ryder Beach. The three turtles have spent months since then recovering out of the public eye at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium, which helps rehabilitate sea turtles as space permits. The facility is also home to two non-releasable harbor seals, LuSeal and Bumper.

“The turtle’s names, based on cartoon characters, were chosen by the New England Aquarium, which coordinates the sea turtle stranding and rehabilitation effort,” Metz-Leland said. “They pick themes each year. Last year it was herbs and spices, so we had turtles here named Lavender and Cumin.”

The Woods Hole Science Aquarium has been rehabilitating sea turtles since the 1990s and has helped care for 31 turtles to date: 16 Kemp’s Ridley, 3 green, 5 loggerheads and 7 diamondback terrapins. The turtles receive regular veterinary care, and get much of their day-to day care from the Aquarium staff and volunteers.

Boo Boo, Dory and Godzilla were packed April 28 into specially built crates for the trip by vehicle to Jekyll Island, Georgia, where they will be released offshore later this week along with rehabilitated turtles from other New England facilities. Turtles are

usually released in local Cape waters in July or August, but the animals are ready to get back to the wild now and the water is too cold.

When sea turtles are first found on the beach, they are sent to the New England Aquarium in Boston, which acts much like a hospital triage center. Their injuries and condition are determined, and they are slowly warmed and treated for pneumonia or any complications from stranding. Once they are stable and to free up hospital space, New England Aquarium sends them to smaller facilities like the Woods Hole Science Aquarium to continue rehabilitation until they have regained full health and are ready to be released to the wild.

Metz-Leland said four species of sea turtles can typically be found in New England waters: green, Kemp's Ridley, leatherback, and loggerhead. Diamondback terrapins, a coastal turtle rather than a marine one and considered threatened under Massachusetts law, is found in marshes and estuaries.

The smallest of the sea turtle species, Kemp's Ridley turtles, are found in the North Atlantic from Florida to New England, and in the Gulf of Mexico. Loggerhead turtles are found in temperate and tropical regions around the world, and are the most abundant sea turtle species in the U.S, ranging from Maine to Florida on the Atlantic coast.

The public Woods Hole Science Aquarium has been part of the federal fisheries laboratory in Woods Hole since 1885, when the first permanent marine science laboratory in the village was completed on Water Street. Today the federal fisheries lab and public aquarium are part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The Woods Hole Science Aquarium is the oldest continuously operating research aquarium in the United States, welcoming more than 80,000 visitors a year.

#

Related web links:

Woods Hole Science Aquarium: <http://aquarium.nefsc.noaa.gov/>

Kemp's Ridley turtle: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/turtles/kempstridley.htm>

Loggerhead turtle: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/turtles/loggerhead.htm>

NEFSC Fish FAQ: <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/faq/fishfaq8.html>