

ADVERTISEMENT

Injured 140-pound loggerhead turtle rescued in Ocean City gets CT scan

by [Frank Kummer](#), Updated: July 23, 2019- 5:00 AM



MOUNT LAUREL ANIMAL HOSPITAL



A 140-pound injured loggerhead sea turtle, recently found floating off the coast of Ocean City, N.J., was a rare rescue: still alive and not chopped up by propellers. Given extensive testing and treatment, including a CT scan at a South Jersey animal hospital, she just might live.

The 20-year-old turtle has a blockage in her gastrointestinal tract that her rescuers believe could be caused by plastic debris, though they had not yet made a definitive diagnosis. The turtle, now named Tabitha, also suffers from pneumonia and air in her body cavity. She was in stable condition as of Monday, though she faces a long recovery.

Loggerheads are listed as a federally threatened or endangered species, though they are not rare. They face getting snarled in fishing gear or marine debris, being struck by boats and their propellers, and even loss of habitat. Plastic ingestion is also a [threat](#) to marine life, including turtle, seals, and Shore birds.

Tabitha's rescue saga began June 27 when she was spotted covered by barnacles and found floating in the ocean by a crew working for a parasailing company. The crew towed her in and took her to the [Marine Mammal Stranding Center](#) in Brigantine.

ADVERTISEMENT

Bob Schoelkopf, who runs the center, said he is thankful the crew took action, but said that loggerheads in distress should not be touched and that authorities or rescue organizations should be called first.

"If you pick one up improperly," Schoelkopf said, "you can damage internal organs or shells. We had to correct [the parasail company] and let them know that."

Schoelkopf said calls for stranded loggerheads are common this time of year, though it's often too late to help. So far in 2019, he said, the center has fielded calls for 17 loggerhead rescues. Only two have lived, including Tabitha. He once recalled a turtle whose entire intestinal tract was filled with plastic.

When Tabitha arrived last month, the center lacked the resources to keep and treat the loggerhead for the year it would require.

Endangered Sea Turtle Receives CT at Mount Laurel Animal Hospital



[Sea Turtle Recovery](#), a nonprofit based in West Orange, N.J., that is federally licensed to handle long-term hospitalization of loggerheads, was called for help. The recovery facility is part of [the Turtle Back Zoo](#).

Bill Deerr, the organization's co-executive director and a marine scientist, said Sea Turtle Recovery has been open 2½ years and Tabitha is only the hospital's second case of a turtle needing extensive treatment.

ADVERTISEMENT

Deerr explained that Tabitha's barnacles indicated she had been stuck on the ocean's surface for a while.

"Buoyancy can be fatal," Deerr said. "It makes them more susceptible to predators and prevents them from diving to eat."

Loggerheads can live from 60 to 80 years, according to Deerr. Tabitha is considered a "subadult" and would not be ready for mating for five years or so. She was found by herself, which is typical of loggerheads.

Deerr's staff administered x-rays on Tabitha, but realized she had multiple issues that would require more advanced equipment. So, they turned to Mount Laurel Animal Hospital, a 24-hour-emergency and specialty care veterinary hospital in Burlington County. The facility, at 25,000 square feet, is one of the largest of its kind in the country.

There, veterinarians from both the hospital and Sea Turtle Recovery rigged Tabitha in a harness and put her through a CT scan, which takes images of bones, blood vessels, and soft tissue. The vets used the results from the scan to try to find a diagnosis for Tabitha.

**MOUNT LAUREL ANIMAL HOSPITAL**

Tabitha, a loggerhead sea turtle, undergoes a CT scan at Mount Laurel Animal Hospital. Suffering from multiple medical issues, she was rescued while floating in the ocean June 27, 2010 off Ocean City.

Christopher Torre, veterinarian and owner of Mount Laurel Animal Hospital, said the staff was “honored” to help.

Tabitha is being administered antibiotics, and will undergo more extensive treatment at Sea Turtle Recovery for whatever is blocking her gastrointestinal tract.

ADVERTISEMENT

A donor who wants to remain anonymous is picking up the cost for Tabitha’s treatment, which can range from \$1,500 to \$3,000. Patrons can “adopt” rescued sea turtles though the Sea Turtle Recovery website.

The donor named the turtle Tabitha after a biblical figure who was thought dead but arose on the urging of the apostle Peter.

SPONSORED CONTENT**She Took Her Husband For Makeover & Is Blown Away** [🔗](#)

by Brain-Sharper



Loggerheads [are so named](#) because of their large heads, which are equipped with powerful jaws. Their top shells are a bit heart-shaped. The reptiles spend the first seven to 15 years in open ocean, and then move closer to shore.

Tabitha's rescuers and attending medical staff say that anyone who comes across what they believe is a sick, injured, or dead sea turtle should report it to the Coast Guard or call local police. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration also runs a 24-hour hotline at 1-866-755-6622 and can contact an organization to help the turtle.



Posted: July 23, 2019 - 5:00 AM

[Frank Kummer](#) | [@FrankKummer](#) | fkummer@inquirer.com

NEWSLETTERS >

Get the news you need to start your day

Sign Up

Never Miss a Story

Subscribe



View 1 Comment

We Recommend

Eastern US cities spewing more methane into air than thought

Seth Borenstein, Associated Press

How hot was the weekend? Hot enough to set a new record, says regional electric grid operator

Andrew Maykuth

Explosion-damaged South Philadelphia refinery files for bankruptcy, again

Andrew Maykuth

One city just banned new natural gas hookups to save the planet. Could Philly follow suit?

Andrew Maykuth

Pennsylvania had more solar projects installed this year, but still lags far behind nearby states

Ellie Rushing

Three Mile Island's 60-year shutdown would cost \$1.2 billion

Andrew Maykuth

ADVERTISEMENT

ADVERTISEMENT

 TWITTER

 FACEBOOK

 INSTAGRAM

NEWS & INFO

[News](#) / [Sports](#) / [Entertainment](#) / [Business](#) / [Health](#) / [Food](#) / [Life](#) / [Opinion](#) / [Archives](#)

ABOUT US

[About The Philadelphia Inquirer](#) / [Advertise](#) / [Contact Us](#) / [Licensing & Permissions](#) / [Photo Reprints](#) / [Newspapers in Education](#) / [Jobs & Internships](#) / [Special Reports](#) / [Acel Moore Workshops](#) / [Newsroom Staff](#)

MARKETPLACE

[Inquirer Store](#) / [Find a Home](#) / [Job Listings](#) / [Special Sections](#) / [All Classifieds](#)

MOBILE APPS

[Inquirer News](#) / [Philly Sports Now](#)



THE INQUIRER

[Digital Edition](#)
[Subscribe](#)
[Subscriber Services](#)

THE DAILY NEWS

[Digital Edition](#)
[Subscribe](#)
[Subscriber Services](#)

The Philadelphia Inquirer

© Copyright 2019, The Philadelphia Inquirer, LLC [Terms of Use](#) / [Privacy Policy](#)