

Saving Sea Turtles

On any given day, Dr. Terry Norton might see six or more patients. But Dr. Norton's patients aren't the kind that most doctors see. His patients are sea turtles. And his "doctor's office" is at the Georgia Sea Turtle Center (GSTC) on Jekyll Island, Georgia.



One of the most recent patients to arrive at the GSTC is Pumpkin, a loggerhead sea turtle named for the Florida creek where she was found. When Pumpkin arrived, she was not showing many signs of life. She had lost a lot of weight because she couldn't open her mouth to eat like a healthy turtle can. Dr. Norton and his team went to work on Pumpkin. They are feeding her a special diet and they are giving her physical therapy so she can learn how to move her mouth again.

Workers at the GSTC work hard to rescue and return sea turtles to their natural habitat. Another goal of the center is to teach people about these "graceful, swimming dinosaurs" and the dangers they face in the wild. Many turtles have come to the center because they were struck by boats, caught up in fishing lines, or harmed by trash thrown into the sea.

Last year, Dr. Norton and his coworkers had a big celebration when they returned a loggerhead sea turtle to the wild. That turtle, Dylan, had been rescued as a hatchling in 1998. She ended up spending many years at the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta, where she was very popular with aquarium visitors. But Dylan was outgrowing her tank at the aquarium, so the people who run the aquarium moved her to the turtle center so workers there could prepare her to be returned to her natural habitat.

At the aquarium, Dylan had been fed by hand for many years, so the GSTC team had to teach her how to capture prey. They taught her other skills she would need to survive in the wild too. Then, last June, a crowd of people gathered on the shores of Jekyll Island to send Dylan back to the sea. A tracking device attached to her shell has tracked her movements ever since. Last month, Dylan was tracked in the Gulf of Mexico, about 250 miles west of the southernmost tip of Florida's mainland.

NEWS WORD BOX

physical therapy
patients capture
rescue device

THINK ABOUT THE NEWS

Dr. Norton and his team work with sea turtles. If you could work to help a species survive, with what species would you most like to work? Why?