



Amanda Grant (left) and Crystal Ramsey, staff veterinarians at South Florida, help examine a green sea turtle along with Gumbo Limbo's Ryan Butts.

TAG-TEAMING FOR TURTLES

WELCOMING THREE of the world's seven sea turtle species to the South Florida Wildlife Center on a single day in August proved a rare and thrilling experience for staff veterinarian Amanda Grant.

The center annually treats more than 12,000 birds and animals spanning over 255 wildlife species. But sea turtles, whose care requires special permits and facilities designed for their rehab needs, rarely arrive first at the center.

On this day, though, the Gumbo Limbo Nature Center (a sea turtle rehabilitation facility in Boca Raton) carefully transported four turtles over to South Florida—two greens, a hawksbill and a loggerhead. All are protected species.

Through a collaboration between the two facilities, Grant examined the turtles using the center's state-of-the-art digital X-ray machine.

Employees suspected one of the green sea turtles was ingesting sand, causing a buildup in his intestines. The second green had visible

papillomas—cauliflower-like growths—on his body. The medical team checked to see if the growths were internal as well, which would indicate a poor prognosis. And they examined the loggerhead and hawksbill for trash.

"Litter is a big deal," says Grant: Turtles often mistake plastics or other garbage floating in the water for jellyfish. "It's pretty amazing what they'll swallow or get entangled in. Ingesting plastics can cause a blockage or can twist the intestines ... and fish hooks can get stuck in their mouth or esophagus."

Fortunately the only evidence of ingested trash was a stainless steel hook in one of the greens, who was expected to pass it unaided. Staff also found no internal growths. The other green did have a significant buildup of sand in his intestines but that was easily resolved with a laxative.

Three of these turtles are once again swimming the seas, with the fourth to follow.

THE BEST OF A BAD SITUATION

A small red fox peeked out surreptitiously at the humans walking by his enclosure at Cape Wildlife Center—curiosity temporarily overpowering shyness. His brother, the more timid of the two, preferred the safety of his den.

"It's exactly how it should be," says Deborah Millman, center director. "They're wild animals. We want them to be shy and reclusive."

Though the details are vague as to how two men acquired the approximately 2-month-old fox kits, center staffers surmise that the babies were caught in a humane trap and their mother killed, most likely out of fear the



animals would harm livestock. Saddened that the kits were orphaned, Millman and staff were nevertheless grateful that the men drove about 100 miles to deliver the babies to the center.

An examination showed that the kits were well cared for by their mother, who would have reared them until they were about 7 months old. Instead, they remained at Cape Wildlife Center until early fall, when they reached that age and were ready to strike out on their own.

"They were released in a suitable habitat where there are things for them to eat—and far away from neighborhoods, pets and farm animals," Millman says.

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