

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Coral World Participates In Rescue Of Injured Green Sea Turtle

Environment / **Published On May 13, 2018 09:49 AM /**

Staff **May 13, 2018**



ST. THOMAS -- A Green Sea Turtle in St. Thomas waters that was most likely injured by blunt-force trauma from a boat or propeller, was rescued with the help of Coral World employees, according to a release issued Saturday.

On Friday May 4, Patrick Cena, a local resident, spotted an injured green sea turtle washing ashore in Christmas Cove. According to Coral World Veterinary Technician, Erica Palmer, who is also a Sea Turtle assistance and rescue responder, "Patrick contacted Coral World for assistance. He then transported Matt Tartaglio, Coral World assistant curator, and me on his boat to Christmas Cove to see what we could do for the turtle." Apparently, the same injured turtle had been spotted on May 1 swimming in

shallow waters off Little St. James, but the turtle was spooked when the individual who tried to come to the turtle's aid entered the water. Cena made the next sighting three days later.

"When we found the turtle it was extremely weak, lethargic, and had no use of its rear flippers, we took it back to Coral World where we administered emergency medications to combat anemia and infection because of a large fracture of its carapace and associated blood loss," said Palmer. "We think the turtle had been injured close to a week earlier because there was dying bone and soft tissues involved."

Coral World staff monitored the turtle 24 hours a day for the first 48 hours. "We provided supportive care and medications during the weekend while we lined up a CT scan with Dr. Jeffrey Guller at St. Thomas Radiology for Monday to assess the extent of the damage," Palmer said. "A veterinary radiologist in the states informed us that the scan revealed a severed spinal cord and massive inflammation, as well as several missing vertebrae."

The most likely cause of the injuries was blunt-force trauma by a boat strike, Coral World said. "We hate to lose a turtle, but the long-term prognosis for survival was so poor in this case because of the severity of the injuries, we made the difficult decision, in consultation with our consulting veterinarian, to humanely euthanize the turtle," Palmer explained.

According to Palmer, who has seen many injured turtles during her work as a STAR responder, blunt-force trauma from boat impact or propellers are a significant threat to sea turtles and other marine animals. All sea turtles are designated as either threatened or endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973. Violations can result in up to one year in prison, up to a \$100,000 fine, and the confiscation of any equipment used during the criminal act.

STAR is a collaboration of NGOs, territorial and federal agencies, veterinarians, and community volunteers. These groups and individuals have joined together to help injured sea turtles to provide better protection through the collection and dissemination information on stranded turtles.

"STAR relies on many community volunteers, local veterinarians, and other donated resources like those offered by Coral World, but the most important participant in STAR is you," Palmer emphasized. "Please report any entrapped, disoriented, sick, injured, or dead sea turtle by calling the hotline at (340) 690-0474. You can find out more about STAR at [STAR-Sea Turtle Assistance and Rescue](#)."

Coral World is the only approved Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Facility in the Virgin Islands and has been conducting and funding turtle rehabilitation since it reopened in 1997 as part of its mission to educate, entertain and inspire appreciation for the Caribbean marine environment, Coral World said.