

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Rescued Green Sea Turtle Named Khepri Is Back In USVI

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A juvenile green sea turtle rescued on February 28 has returned to the Virgin Islands after nearly five months at the Turtle Hospital in Florida Keys, according to Coral World. The turtle was fittingly named after the Egyptian god who represents sunrise and new life. It was stranded at the bottom of the Coculus Point cliffs. The rescuer thought the turtle was dead but contacted Coral World for assistance. Erica Palmer, Coral World veterinary technician, and Ryan Firment, an aquarist at the park, responded to the call.

“The severe wound to its right front flipper suggested an attack by a predator. The turtle was barely conscious and upside down on the rocks when found,” Ms. Palmer noted. She and Mr. Firment transferred the turtle to Coral World where the dedicated staff

provided supportive care, wound treatment, and nutritional therapy that allowed the turtle to stabilize and regain strength prior to transfer to the Florida Keys based Turtle Hospital, Coral World said.

American Airlines generously flew the turtle to Miami on Tuesday, March 26. Mark Nelson, general manager of American Airlines in the U.S. Virgin Islands, took his day off to fly with Khepri and facilitate the transfer to the Turtle Hospital in Marathon, Florida Keys. Bette Zirkelbach, Manager of the Turtle Hospital stated, "It was touch and go with Khepri's injured flipper in the beginning and the veterinarians were not sure they could save the flipper. In addition to antibiotics, physical therapy and a healthy diet, wound care included natural honey and class 4 laser therapy." Ms. Zirkelbach went on to say the right front flipper has decreased range of motion but allows Khepri to swim well enough for release to the wild.

Again, courtesy of American Airlines, Khepri flew home on Tuesday in the company of Ms. Zirkelbach and Turtle Hospital founder/director Richie Moretti.

Khepri was evaluated and held overnight for observation and will be released today to its home in Frenchman's Bay by representatives from Coral World, the Turtle Hospital and American Airlines. Coral World General Curator Lee Kellar stated, "We are thrilled that we were able to help save this turtle. Coral World's mission is to educate the public about conservation of our ocean resources and to participate in rescue and rehabilitation. Returning Khepri to his ocean home symbolizes our commitment."

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.

Coral World said it 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 and inspire appreciation for the Caribbean marine environment as well as entertain.