

# News Splash

The National Marine Life Center, Inc. Newsletter @ www.nmlc.org @ Vol. 10, No. 3, Winter 2006-2007

## RELEASE!

On August 24<sup>th</sup>, the National Marine Life Center was pleased to partner with NOAA Fisheries, the New England Aquarium, the NOAA Woods Hole Science Aquarium, and MassAudubon Wellfleet Bay in the largest release of rehabilitated sea turtles in New England history.



Photos by: Josh Greenberg (top left), and Mendy Garron, NOAA (top right and bottom both)

### Surf the web and help animals surf the ocean!

The internet is a fabulous tool to find information, and now you can help care for stranded marine animals every time you search the web!

Internet search engines such as Google and Yahoo! generate advertising dollars through ads on their websites. A new search engine called **GoodSearch.com** takes these advertising revenues and invests them back into non-profit organizations. The National Marine Life Center can receive 1¢ every time you search the web - at no cost to you! The more people searching, the more money is generated to help animals. For example, if everyone on NMLC's mailing list (~2,500 people) GoodSearched the web twice a day, NMLC would receive \$1,500 a month! This would cover the electric bill for our Clinic's life support system (pumps and filtration) for one month, or pay for a high school or college intern for one month! Now, if each of our supporters told two friends, and their friends told two friends, and so on and so on - imagine the impact! The site is powered by Yahoo! technology so you get the same great results as a conventional search engine. Visit [GoodSearch.com](http://GoodSearch.com), choose the National Marine Life Center as your beneficiary, and start surfing the web! You can also click on the "GoodSearch" button on NMLC's home page, [www.nmlc.org](http://www.nmlc.org).

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NATIONAL  
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CENTER

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### Mission Statement

Dedicated to rehabilitating and releasing stranded whales, dolphins, seals, and sea turtles, and to advancing scientific knowledge and education in marine wildlife health and conservation.

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## Message from the President



*Kathy & Jade Jade the wonder dog*

*Kathryn Zagzebski*

The phone rang, interrupting a writing project. The rest of the staff was at lunch. Distracted, I reached to answer. The previous call had been about a jellyfish. This caller began talking about an injured seagull. Marine life, yes, but outside our permitted jurisdiction to respond. However, it was my friend Jen on the other line, the co-owner of the eclectic and interesting "Antique Asylum" across the street. The gull had been hanging around behind the store all morning and didn't seem able to fly. Although I wasn't sure I could help, I said I'd come over and take a look.

Jen pointed in the direction she'd last seen the gull, and together we began peeking into doorways. The bird had walked across the street and was hanging out to one side of the Surf Shop. As I got closer, it was evident that the bird was injured - he had several inches of clear plastic line hanging out of his mouth. "Uh oh," I thought. It looked bad. Despite its injury, the bird was still alert and I wasn't totally convinced he couldn't fly away; it looked to be a potentially difficult capture. However, I had to try.

I ran into the Surf Shop where Melissa, also an NMLC volunteer, was working. She said she'd keep an eye on the gull and keep people away while I ran back across the street. Minutes later, armed with a net, towel and box and joined by NMLC volunteer Lauren as well as CT and Katie P from the Cape Cod Stranding Network, we managed to capture the gull. (It was easier than it sounds; as it turned out, he really couldn't fly.) We carried the gull back across the street, placed him in a vented carrier in a cool, darkened area away from people, and called the Cape Wildlife Center who would attempt rehabilitation. The gull, who had put up quite a struggle, settled down perhaps knowing he was now safe.



Looking into the gull's eyes, I wondered what he thought and felt. The tasty morsel he had sought wound up having a stinging bite on the end; he was grounded - a scary state for one whose safety depends on flight; and he had been chased, netted, and boxed by some strange looking aliens with odd lanky appendages instead of soft feathers. It had to be scary. At least he now had a second chance. In replaying the events of the day, I thought about all the good people involved in what seemed like a simple rescue - from storeowners who cared enough to call and to keep people away, to marine mammal rescue colleagues willing to try their skills at another sort of animal, to the wildlife rescue place with experts in this type of injury, to all the folks who support these efforts and make them possible. It truly is a group effort.

I invite you to read this edition of NewsSplash for an update on NMLC. It's been an exciting year, thanks in no small part to your support. You are an important part of the community that helps to conserve and protect marine wildlife. On behalf of all the animals who can't speak for themselves, thank you for caring. Best wishes for a joyous new year.

## Introducing NMLC's Newest Arrivals.... The Northern Red-Bellied Cooters

By Michele A. Sims, D.V.M., Associate Veterinarian



About the size of a quarter and weighing only ten grams each, the six tiny cooters arrived at the National Marine Life Center on September 22<sup>nd</sup>. Since their arrival, they have quintupled in size and currently weigh an average of 55 grams each.

Northern red-bellied cooters, *Pseudemys rubriventris bangsi*, were originally called Plymouth red-belly turtles. The name "rubriventris" comes from the Latin words "rubidus" meaning reddish and "venter" meaning belly, and refers to the brilliant red color of their plastron (undershell) (Graham, 1991). They are the second largest freshwater turtle in Massachusetts, and adults can weigh as much as ten pounds.

Outside of the mid-Atlantic region, the only place red-bellied cooters are found is in Plymouth County, Massachusetts. Most of the state's cooter population is found in Federal Furnace Pond in Plymouth, as well as several other surrounding ponds. In addition, many of the reservoirs and upland watershed areas managed by the cranberry bog industry provide high quality habitat for the turtle.

In the early 1980's, the number of red-bellies in Massachusetts dwindled to about 300 and they were placed on the state and federal endangered species lists. Several factors contributed to their population decline. Hatchlings typically weigh only five to eight grams and are a mere 1¼ inches long, making them easy prey for birds, fish, bullfrogs, raccoons, and skunks. The hatchlings are susceptible to hypothermia if an early fall freeze keeps them in the nest and the winter is harsh. Females don't breed

until they are 15 to 17 years old. In the wild, only about one out of 200 eggs laid survives. Other factors that contributed to their population decline include habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, and pesticide exposure.

In 1985, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife initiated a "Headstart" program to try to save the turtles. As part of this program, hatchlings are taken from their nests each fall and raised over the winter in warm aquariums. They are given an unlimited food supply consisting of fresh romaine lettuce and ReptoMin® sticks to accelerate their growth. They are then released in the spring having the advantage of a larger than normal size which increases their chances to avoid predators. NMLC is proud to partner with the state, other wildlife facilities, and local high schools who are participating in the Headstart program. The cranberry industry has been particularly supportive of the recovery effort, and individual growers are important partners in the program. The survival rate for those that spend nine months in turtle Headstart is about 95 percent.

Though still on the endangered species list, with the assistance and caring of numerous government agencies, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and companies, the population of red-bellied cooters is on the increase.

References:

~ Amaral, Michael, 1994. Plymouth Red Bellied Turtle Recovery Plan.  
~ Graham, Terry, 1991. *Pseudemys rubriventris* (LeConte), redbelly turtle. Catalogue of American Amphibians and Reptiles, 510:1-4.



## Wish List

Your in-kind gifts help us direct more of our resources into our rehabilitation, research, and education programs. If you can donate any of these items, please contact Brian Moore, Animal Care & Facilities Coordinator, at (508) 743-9888 or [bmoore@nmlc.org](mailto:bmoore@nmlc.org). Tax receipts available. Thank you!

- ~ X-Ray machine
- ~ Developer or digital developer
- ~ Infant or veterinary incubators
- ~ Portable vital signs monitor
- ~ Centrifuge
- ~ Autoclave for surgical tools
- ~ Gas anesthesia machine
- ~ Small "Pony" Oxygen tank, E cylinder size with regulator and cart
- ~ Stainless steel medical exam table
- ~ I-Stat handheld diagnostic machine
- ~ Submersible fish pond pump
- ~ Rubbermaid storage cabinets
- ~ Rolling handcarts (Rubbermaid)
- ~ Hand trucks (standing and collapsible)
- ~ Stethoscopes
- ~ Latex and latex substitute exam gloves
- ~ 18 inch & 24 inch metal hemostats
- ~ Stainless or plastic boat hook
- ~ Bookshelves
- ~ Metal storage cabinets
- ~ Lockers
- ~ Walky-talkies
- ~ Arts and crafts supplies

## Thank You...

to the following individuals who donated Wish List items!

Mr. Tim O'Kayhee and Sysco Corp. donated 27 heavy-duty, restaurant-grade cutting boards - enough to chop lots of fish for all our patients!

Ms. Norma Roberts donated a Petco gift certificate that we can use to purchase animal care supplies.

Ian Wood and Survival Beachwear® donated laundry detergent and trash bags.

An anonymous donor gave flashlights.

Ms. Linda Gray donated several boxes of needles and syringes.

## Encounters: An Olive Ridley Hatching in Mexico

By Lynn Marie Zagzebski

“Hey, is that a turtle head?” I asked my husband in disbelief. We were waiting for the start of our eco-tour on the virgin coastline of La Ventanilla in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. I had wandered over to a shelf of sand-filled Styrofoam coolers on the back patio of the small nature center of *Servicios Ecoturísticos La Ventanilla*. Each cooler was carefully marked with the date and what looked to be a batch number. As I was peeping into one of these coolers, a small pre-historic head suddenly appeared. Looking a bit groggy as if waking up from a very long nap, this tiny creature gazed around dazedly then slowly pulled its right front flipper up from



under the sand.

Our guide came over to see what we were looking at. Indeed, we found out, it was a sea turtle head. This was the “birthday,” or perhaps “hatch day” is more accurate, of about fifty *golfina* (olive ridley turtles). The olive ridley is one of nine subspecies of sea turtles that come to the beaches of the Oaxacan coast each year to reproduce.

*Servicios Ecoturísticos La Ventanilla* is one of a small number of organizations permitted to gather and protect sea turtle eggs. Protection is critical, despite the 1990 enactment of a federal ban on hunting sea turtles and on harvesting their eggs. Sea turtle eggs are found in black markets even today, and fetch a high price for

their purported aphrodisiac properties. The female turtles make easy prey for poachers as they float passively just off the coast before coming to shore to lay their eggs at night. In addition, despite some beaches being federally protected and others being watched by concerned citizens, poaching continues on land as well.

A few decades back, the story of sea turtles in this region was graver yet. Mazunte, the community just down the road from La Ventanilla, was the location of the world's largest olive ridley fishery. The eggs, meat, leather, and shells of the thousands of sea turtles that came to this coast each year provided a seemingly endless and renewable source of income for the community, not to mention high returns for the fishery owners. When biologists and ecologists noted that the numbers of these marine creatures were dwindling, they sounded an alarm. Eventually, they were successful in convincing the President of Mexico to protect the turtles.

The story in Oaxaca reflects the unequivocal complexity of environmental issues and interventions in a developing country. This success for the sea turtles had serious social and economic repercussions for the people of Mazunte. Fortunately, the collaborative efforts of numerous groups and individuals led to the creation of several sustainable enterprises, including the ecotourism services of La Ventanilla. Mazunte is also now the site of the *Centro Mexicano de la Tortuga*, which draws environmentally-minded tourists and scientists from all over the world.

As we stood there peering into the cooler, another head emerged. Soon we were looking at two tiny *golfinas* moving through the sand in slow motion. Every once in a while the sand would give, and one of the tur-

tles would lose the ground it had just gained on its tiny journey. As the first one maneuvered to pull itself up out of the sand, it looked as if it was waving hello.

We were invited by our hosts to come to a release of the turtles that evening at sundown. Eagerly we agreed. When we returned that night, our two turtles were now indistinct, intermixed with all their siblings in a plastic bin on the floor. The clacking sound of tiny flippers against the plastic as the turtles clamored over each other added a curious percussion to the rhythmic booms of the waves upon the shore.

They were ready to go, these diminutive creatures. Their frenetic activity underscored that fact. As the



**Encounters, continued**

ten of us stood in a line cheering the hatchlings on, I couldn't help but think that this must be a little bit like how parents feel when they drop off their kids for the first time at college...or even kindergarten. "Have fun. Learn a lot...but take care of yourself please." The road to adulthood is full of obstacles.

As we stood there burrowing our bare feet into the sand, perhaps it was our understanding of the obstacles that these turtles faced that made us cheer even louder as we watched them advance pluckily toward the sea.



Five weeks after our visit to the magical Oaxacan coast, our daughter Sofia was born. On this same day, December 6, 2005, Lemony Snicket, Valentine, and Smarty arrived at the National Marine Life Center. Sofia's life seems inextricably tied to sea turtles. As we reflect on the conversations that we will have with Sofia as she grows older, one of these is why her Aunt Kathy and the rest of NMLC's dedicated staff and volunteers work so hard to rehabilitate and, when possible, release sea turtles and other marine animals.

"It's because humans have left a very big footprint," I envision saying - or something like that in children's terms. We have made such an impact on the environment that innumerable habitats have been drastically altered. Thus, we must hold ourselves responsible for helping members of other species survive in this world that we have created. We must do this

through using a multi-pronged strategy that includes the generation of environmentally sustainable ventures like those now found in Oaxaca, as well as the rehabilitation of individual animals when it is scientifically appropriate and possible to do so.

But then, maybe she will not be the one asking why; children so often almost intuitively know what it takes us adults such a long time to learn.

For more information:

- ~ *Centro Mexicano de la Tortuga* <http://centromexicanodelatortuga.org/>
- ~ *Servicios Ecoturísticos La Ventanilla* <http://www.bioplaneta.com/bioing/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=47>
- ~ *Story of Mazunte* <http://www.change-makers.net/journal/02june/nauman.cfm>
- ~ *NOAA & U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Recovery Plan for U.S. Populations of the Olive Ridley Turtle* [http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery\\_plans/1998/981201a.pdf](http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery_plans/1998/981201a.pdf)



**Claw Update:**

*Claw was held back from August's release because she had developed an abscess on her left front flipper elbow joint. Veterinarians Rogers and Michele surgically removed the abscess. Now, after several months of healing, Claw is ready for release!*

**Summer Interns Teach Kids About Marine Life**

This past summer, thanks to the generosity of Joan Bentinck-Smith and JBS Enterprises, two wonderful student interns came to NMLC to help develop our education programs. Rebecca Nourse, from Williams College, and Kjerstie "KJ" Lindelof, from Upper Cape Technical High School, worked on projects for the Discovery Center, taught education programs, and also helped with administrative and facilities projects. Thank you both for all your hard work!

*Rebecca & KJ*



**E-Bay lovers:**

If you buy and sell on e-Bay, there is a great way to help the National Marine Life Center while you shop! Go to [MissionFish.org](http://MissionFish.org) to post your items to sell, choosing NMLC as the beneficiary of part or all of your profits. When you sell your items, MissionFish.org will automatically take care of your donation! You can also look for e-Bay items others are selling to benefit NMLC. For more information, click on the "donate" button on NMLC's home page, [www.nmlc.org](http://www.nmlc.org), and then click on the link for MissionFish.org.



## A Christmas Seal? There's Room at the Inn

By Brian Moore, Animal Care & Facilities Coordinator

This past September, the staff at NMLC was faced with a wonderful challenge - how to care for the last remaining turtle from the 2005 stranding season and simultaneously care for any seals that may strand. We had just signed a "Sub-LOA" agreement with the New England Aquarium authorizing us to admit seals, and the only rehab space available was that housing our turtle. (To eliminate possibilities of cross-contamination, sea turtles and seals may not be housed in the same rehab pool.)

As a group, we discussed many options - move "Claw" to another facility so we could open the two larger pools for seals, keep "Claw" and do not accept seals, or build a separate area dedicated to seal rehabilitation. We decided the last option was the best for NMLC, as this would allow us to increase our overall capacity to care for stranded marine animals. With a plan in mind, we set out to build the new seal pen.

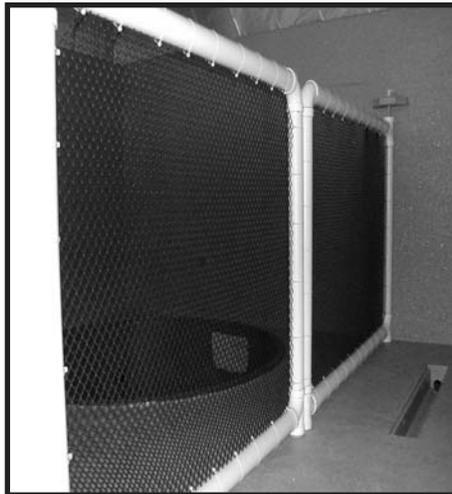
Construction of the pen started with Mike Sims, from Precision Framing and Remodel, lending his expertise in building materials and framing. Mike figured out the materials we needed, and then off to Home Depot we went. After some discussion and several design changes, we returned to NMLC with the supplies. It wasn't long before Mike had the first wall built and was working on the second. While I gave Mike a hand measuring and cutting, Dr. Michele Sims and Danielle O'Neil put their design talents to work building the roof supports. We all enjoyed working along side Mike and appreciate his dedication and willingness to help out.

The next challenge we faced after initial construction was how we could make the seal pen waterproof and

and easily cleaned and disinfected.

Turning to state-of-the art technology, we began looking at various spray-on linings and were fortunate to find a product and installer willing to make a significant donation. Flying all the way from Washington State, Gary and Karyn Byers from Ameri-Coatings, Inc. brought materials, a great sense of humor, and dedicated four full days of their time to coat the seal area with a product called "polyurea."

What is polyurea? Gary and Karyn's definition is "a urethane waterproofing system that provides a long lasting, chemical resistant, easily cleanable tough surface." My definition is "truly amazing!"



With the inside of the seal rehab area complete, it was time to put on the finishing touches. While Joanne Nicholson and the NMLC volunteer team Lauren, Sarah, Kathy, KJ and Annie were finishing the painting, Wayne, our master problem solving craftsman, designed a rack for boots and slickers as well as fencing to divide the area into two separate areas - a dry side for medical treatments and a wet side that allows access to the pool.

Measuring 15 x 10 feet with a 400-



gallon pool, the seal pen (fondly known as the "seal taj-mahal") is now ready for its first patient - just in time for the busy marine mammal stranding season.

The NMLC staff is incredibly grateful to our volunteers and generous donors who made this all possible. Without your dedication and support, we would not be prepared to provide care to sick and injured seals.

Stay tuned for the story of our first pinniped patient in our next newsletter.

### A special thank you...

to Mr. Edward Osmun of E&T Farms in West Barnstable for donating a new 800-gallon tank for our system! Thank you also to Mrs. Barbara Our for facilitating this wonderful donation. The tank is currently used to hold the water reserves necessary for the seal and sea turtle tanks, and it will be used in the future as a quarantine tank. With wonderful in-kind donors like these, we are able to put more of our resources into direct program expenses. Thanks for helping care for stranded marine animals!

## Ways to Help NMLC this Holiday Season

### Charitable Gift Annuities - Increase your cash flow and help get animals back in the flow

With the stock market's constant volatility, interest rates at their lowest, and the economy continuing to struggle, many people are looking for alternative, more secure ways to protect their finances and their future, increase their income, and enjoy immediate and significant tax benefits while still being able to help their favorite charity. We're hoping that's the National Marine Life Center.

With a charitable gift annuity, you can make a gift today of cash or appreciated stock and receive a stream of guaranteed, fixed income for life for yourself and/or a loved one. You'll receive a portion of that income tax free, receive a charitable income tax deduction, and create a personal legacy for NMLC. This is a truly special way to help care for marine animals while increasing your income.

Gift annuities are often used as part of retirement planning to help build income for those who are already retired or to provide a future income stream for those who are planning for retirement. Gift annuities may be created for the lifetime of a survivor as well. By setting up a charitable gift annuity, you can provide supplemental income for yourself; make a meaningful gift to NMLC, enjoy income, gift and estate tax savings, and provide asset management for your heirs.

So why not increase your cash flow while helping marine animals get back in the flow! Interested in learning more? Call Liz Brown in our Development Department at (508) 743-9888.

### Pension Protection Act - An important tax opportunity available for a limited time only

The recently passed Pension Protection Act of 2006 allows people who have reached age 70½ to exclude from their income up to \$100,000 per year in retirement plan assets if it is contributed directly to a qualifying charity. This new "IRA charitable rollover" will be allowed for only two tax years (2006 and 2007), and must be made from a traditional or Roth IRA. Under the new law, the donor is able to give the full amount to the charity because none of it is included as income for tax purposes!

So, if you'd like to consider making a larger contribution to NMLC, consult with your tax advisors to see if this opportunity is appropriate for you. For more information, call NMLC's Development Department at (508) 743-9888. We'll be happy to help.

### Get a tax break when you donate your vehicle!

The National Marine Life Center's vehicle donation program, run by Donate 4 Charity, makes it easy to donate your vehicle and benefit stranded marine animals. Donate4Charity takes care of all of the vehicle paperwork, and also sends you a receipt for tax purposes. They'll even arrange pickup of your car. The organization fixes up and sells your vehicle, donating the net proceeds to NMLC. For more information, call (866) 392-4483, or go to NMLC's home page, [www.nmlc.org](http://www.nmlc.org), click on the "donate" button, then click on Donate4Charity.

### NMLC's New On-Line Gift Shop

National Marine Life Center logo gear makes the perfect holiday gift! You can purchase everything from t-shirts and "hoodie" sweatshirts, to caps and mouse-pads, to aprons and mugs. You can even buy an NMLC t-shirt for your dog! Managed by CafePress.com, net proceeds from the store benefit NMLC's rehabilitation, science, and education programs. Simply click on the "on-line gift shop" link from NMLC's home page at [www.nmlc.org](http://www.nmlc.org), and begin shopping!



### Shop on-line at iGive.com and help animals!

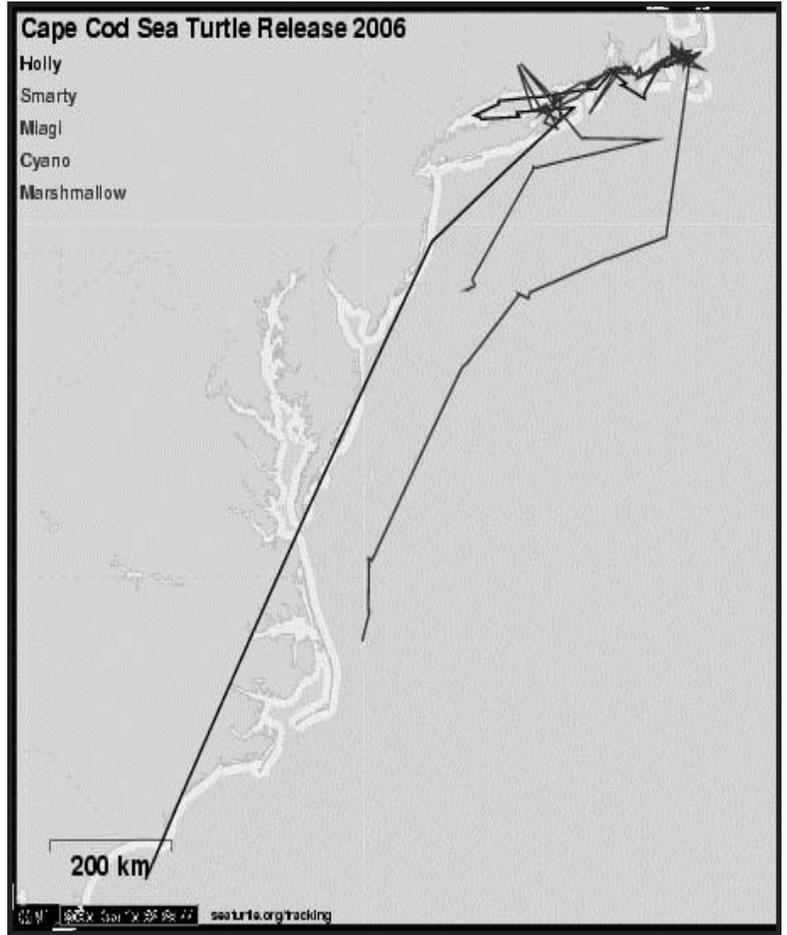
Shop on-line for everything from books to baby clothes, tools to tulips, art supplies to airline tickets and a portion of your purchase price can be donated to the National Marine Life Center. Simply sign up at [iGive.com](http://iGive.com), choose NMLC as your non-profit beneficiary, and start shopping at any of the hundreds of name-brand stores available in this internet mall. Items are competitively priced, and you can enjoy sales and other specials from the comfort of your living room. You can even download a convenient shopping tool that automatically calculates what percentage is donated at each store. If you shop on-line, this is a safe and easy way to help stranded marine animals while saving money on your purchases! Simply click on the "donate" button on NMLC's home page, [www.nmlc.org](http://www.nmlc.org), and you'll be taken to a link for [iGive.com](http://iGive.com).

# Where are they now?

Five of the fourteen sea turtles released on August 24th were tagged with satellite tags to help scientists track their progress after release. This project, led by the New England Aquarium, seeks to study the post release survivorship of rehabilitated turtles. Aquarium scientists will also be studying and observing the turtles' habitat use and migration routes post-release. This project is one example of how rehabilitating stranded marine animals helps us learn more about their species, ultimately leading to improved conservation measures.

While we have lost signal for Smarty, the one tagged turtle rehabilitated at NMLC, the progress of the other animals gives us a general indication of where Smarty, Lemony Snicket, Valentine, Jack, Kelly, Flash, and the other released turtles are right now. To see the turtles' current locations, visit [www.seaturtle.org/tracking](http://www.seaturtle.org/tracking) and click on the link for "Cape Cod Sea Turtle Release 2006."

The map here is reproduced with permission from the New England Aquarium and [seaturtle.org](http://seaturtle.org).



*"Flash" (carried by Animal Care Coordinator Briane Moore) is introduced to excited children just prior to release.*  
*Photo by Sarah Herzig, CCSN.*



*Caring for Stranded Marine Animals*  
**NATIONAL MARINE LIFE CENTER**  
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