

Rounds

Animal Health
Department

Medical Rounds

"medicine for all"



Caring for Stranded Marine Animals

NATIONAL
MARINE
L I F E
CENTER

Notes

Veterinary Research
Department

Under the microscope

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Rounds Notes is a report on the health of animals at the National Marine Life Center from Sea Rogers Williams VMD for the staff, volunteers, and community of the center including professionals involved the captive care of similar species, the views expressed are not necessarily that of NMLC. Information in Rounds Notes should be considered confidential and used solely to benefit the health of aquatic animals everywhere.

December 27, 2011

Rounds Notes

9: 29-31 (2011)

Headlines News:2011, the year of the cooter

2011 review

The NMLC cared for 23 animals in 2011, 21 endangered Northern red-bellied cooters, and 2 threatened diamondback terrapins. For the cooters, 16 were part of the long standing MassWildlife head-start program, which represents two year-classes, with 8 released in May, and 8 current hatchling that will be released May 2012. The other five cooters were animals that developed problems during head-start at other organizations, and were transferred to the NMLC for additional medical care and evaluation. Catch-22, the cooter that ate a staple and developed a fungal infection, is doing well. Our efforts at identifying the fungus proved difficult and prolonged but the infection has been better characterized and likely represents a fastidious fungus new to scientific description. Treatment is underway and we hope to release Catch22 in the spring or summer. Four cooters with metabolic bone disease (MBD) were also transferred to the center in 2011. Of these four, one arrived dead, and all were severely hypo-calcemic. The remaining three have responded nicely to therapy and should be released in May as well. One diamondback terrapin was returned to the wild after a reverse quarantine, and another through a joint effort with Tuff's Wildlife Center was overwintered. This terrapin had fallen into windowsill and became dehydrated and could not brumate naturally. Both of these cases resulted in successful rehabilitations.



Sea Turtles: open for rehab

The center was approved to reopen for sea turtle rehabilitation this year in the new hospital. The two large sea turtle tanks never looked better, and the turtle room is much more comfortable than the tented room in the old warehouse. Due to the unseasonably warm early winter, cold-stun turtles were delayed in hitting the beach, instead of being a boom for the turtles, once they did come ashore they were in much worse shape than previous years. The total of cold-stunned sea turtles is not unusual (120 so far), but the overall mortality of over 50% is not good news for the turtles at all. As in previous years we stand ready to help the New England Aquarium once some of the turtles stabilize.



Having multiple local organizations active with sea turtle rehabilitation aids the overall sea turtle stranding and salvage network efforts in several ways.

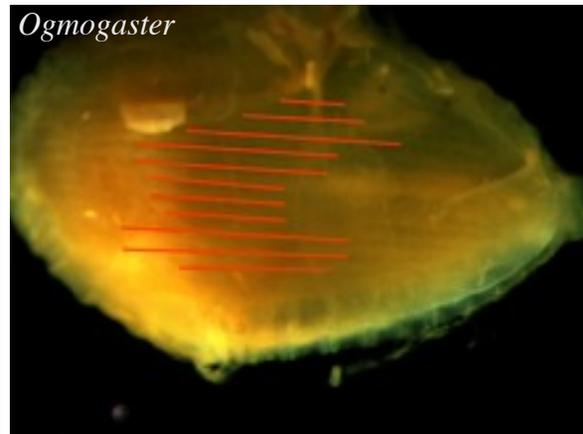
- 1) Having more than one organization allows separation, so not all of the turtles are in one basket so to speak. Thus, an outbreak of a viral infection, coccidia or other contagious pathogen can not infect an entire year class.
- 2) Animals diagnosed with a wild-type pathogen with contagious potential such as fibropapilloma or other condition could be grouped and housed accordingly.
- 3) Multiple organizations will each have individual and unique strengths that can be utilized for the benefit of the turtles.
- 4) Keeping multiple organizations active and experienced with sea turtle husbandry and medical care means these organizations will be ready when we have a year with large numbers of sea turtles that need rehabilitation all at once.
- 5) Adding capacity to the network is a benefit and resource during natural and man-made catastrophes such as oil-spills and more southern cold-stun events, or other out-of-network needs.
- 6) The cost of sea turtle rehabilitation can be shared over multiple organizations.

Phocids, the true seals: sub-letter application continues

The NMLC has filed for a sub-letter agreement to provide rehabilitation of seals as an off-site facility of the long-standing MARC program at UNE. This is an important first step in the process of the NMLC receiving our independent Stranding Agreement with NOAA Fisheries. Representatives from UNE will be inspecting our facility this week as we move closer to an agreement. We are still subject to NOAA Fisheries approval of this plan, but hope to open for seal patients in 2012.

Under the Microscope: parasites abound

The NMLC received a Prescott Grant to study the parasites of marine mammals, and while the lab is still being set up we have received and studied samples from Hawaii and California to Cape Cod, Maine, and Maryland. I have looked at specimens from Mysticetes and Odontocetes, Otariids and Phocids, just missing the beaked whales, but I hear Baltimore has some for me and I'm just waiting on a shipment. Tentative identifications have already lead to two new parasite-host relationships (*Anophryocephalus* in a sea lion, and *Ogmogaster* in a humpback whale). Please send your samples in and I already have over 100 samples waiting for their turn Under the Microscope, and I'm not even set up yet!



Look for remarkable things in 2012-2013.

Happy new year, and my best wishes for all of the good things to come . . .

C. Rogers Williams VMD

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