

Johnny Morris
WONDERS OF WILDLIFE
NATIONAL
MUSEUM & AQUARIUM

Johnny Morris' Sea Turtle Center at Wonders of Wildlife Welcomes Fifth Group of Critically Ill Sea Turtles for Rehabilitation

Drastic Spike in Sea Turtle Strandings Along the U.S. Northeast Coast Highlights Urgent Need for Marine Conservation



Team members from Wonders of Wildlife eagerly await the arrival of the sea turtles

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – February 12, 2025 --Johnny Morris' Wonders of Wildlife National Museum & Aquarium (WOW), a world-class nonprofit conservation organization, has welcomed its fifth group of critically ill sea turtles to its cutting-edge Sea Turtle Center. As the only dedicated sea turtle rescue facility in the Midwest, WOW has successfully rehabilitated more than 40 sea turtles — including loggerheads, green sea turtles, and Kemp's ridley sea turtles — since its founding in 2020, making a lasting impact on marine conservation in the heart of the Missouri Ozarks.

The latest group of 20 loggerhead and Kemp's ridley sea turtles arrived in Springfield, Missouri, at the end of December, following a dramatic increase in sea turtle strandings along the northeastern U.S. coast due to rapidly dropping ocean temperatures. The turtles were transported from The New England Aquarium in Boston, Massachusetts, via a rescue flight coordinated by the nonprofit organization Turtles Fly Too. Upon arrival, WOW's expert animal care team immediately began providing advanced medical care, giving these turtles a second chance at survival and, ultimately, a return to the wild.



WOW team members place a Kemp's ridley turtle within the center's holding area

The 20 sea turtles are receiving life-saving treatment, including hydration therapy, wound management, nutritional support, and specialized veterinary care. Once stabilized, they will be released back into their natural habitats in coordination with federal and state wildlife agencies such as the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

“Our team is passionate about giving these turtles the best chance for survival,” said Mike Daniel, Director of Animal Care at Wonders of Wildlife. “Every rescue is a step toward protecting the future of these endangered species, and we’re honored to be a key part of that effort.”

Increased Cold-Stunning in the Northeast

The rescued sea turtles suffer from “cold-stunning,” a life-threatening condition caused by sudden drops in ocean temperatures. As ectothermic animals, sea turtles rely on their environment to regulate their body temperature. When temperatures fall too quickly, turtles can become immobile and experience severe conditions such as hypothermia, pneumonia, and dehydration.

NOAA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have reported over 400 cold-stunned sea turtles along the U.S. East Coast this season alone, each requiring urgent medical care. Due to the complexity of their life cycle, only 1 in 1,000 sea turtle hatchlings survive to adulthood, making every successful rehabilitation and release critical to the survival of these endangered species.

Although the newly rescued turtles are not accessible to the public due to their fragile condition, guests can still connect with WOW’s resident green sea turtles, Izzy and Ms. Pam, in the Open Ocean exhibit, learning firsthand about these endangered species and how to help protect

them.

Expanding Conservation through Satellite Tracking

In spring 2024, WOW introduced advanced satellite tracking technology to monitor rehabilitated sea turtles after their release – a new project made possible by Bass Pro Shops and Cabela’s generous Outdoor Fund grant. This advanced technology allows researchers to collect valuable data on turtle migration patterns, habitats, and overall life cycle. Guests can follow the journeys of five sea turtles released earlier this year through an interactive tracking feature on WOW’s website.

Building on this success, WOW plans to expand its satellite tagging program with this latest group of rescued turtles. Eligible turtles will be fitted with specialized satellite tracking devices before their release, allowing conservation scientists to monitor their progress in near real-time.

“Our commitment to sea turtle conservation extends far beyond the coasts,” Daniel added. “By integrating advanced tracking technology into our program, we’re not only giving these turtles a second chance at life but also contributing to critical global research efforts that can help protect future generations.”

Inspiring the Next Generation of Conservationists

In addition to its sea turtle rescue and rehabilitation efforts, WOW plans to partner with local schools to inspire the next generation of ocean conservation advocates. Through educational programs, interactive exhibits, and behind-the-scenes tours, students will learn about marine conservation and the importance of protecting endangered species like sea turtles.

For more information about Wonders of Wildlife's Sea Turtle Center, sea turtle tracking, and upcoming programs, visit wondersofwildlife.org/sea-turtles.

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About Johnny Morris' Wonders of Wildlife National Museum & Aquarium

Johnny Morris' Wonders of Wildlife National Museum & Aquarium consists of an all-new 1.5-million-gallon Aquarium Adventure showcasing 35,000 live fish, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and birds, and immersive Wildlife Galleries that bring visitors eye-to-eye with the greatest collection of record-setting game animals ever assembled. Created by noted conservationist and Bass Pro Shops founder Johnny Morris, the 350,000-square-foot experience celebrates those who hunt, fish, and act as stewards of the land and water. Located next to Bass Pro Shops National Headquarters in Springfield, Missouri, the campus is a centerpiece of America's Conservation Capital in Missouri's Ozark Mountains. Wonders of Wildlife has been voted "Best New Attraction in America" and "America's Best Aquarium" an unprecedented six times by the readers of *USA TODAY*, and in 2022 received its AZA accreditation. For more information, visit www.wondersofwildlife.org.