

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

### *Transfer of Solstice the Sea Turtle from Oregon Coast Aquarium*

**1. What kind of turtle is Solstice?**

She is an olive ridley sea turtle. Olive ridleys are listed as endangered. They are the smallest sea turtle in the Pacific at 22 to 31 inches when fully grown and a maximum weight of about 100 pounds.

**2. Where do turtles like Solstice normally live?**

Many species of sea turtles occur throughout the Pacific Ocean, including the relatively cold waters of Oregon and Washington coasts. Some sea turtles even occur in Alaska! Our coastal waters are highly productive and provide excellent food resources. However, sea turtles typically do not occur on our beaches unless they are seriously sick or injured. The species most typically stranded in the Pacific Northwest include olive Ridley and green sea turtles.

Olive ridley sea turtles are usually found in the tropics and are thought to mostly venture no further north than Southern California on the eastern Pacific coast. Of the turtles that strand in Oregon, this species is relatively common and have been seen as far north as Alaska.

**3. When and where was Solstice found?**

Solstice was found by members of the public in Washington near Oysterville on December 21, 2014. She was rescued by Marine Mammal Stranding Network volunteers and brought to the Seaside Aquarium. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff quickly responded and transported her to the Oregon Coast Aquarium in Newport, Oregon for critical care to treat hypothermia, dehydration, and other minor injuries.

**4. What is her size and status?**

Solstice is approximately 2 feet long and weighs 45 to 50 pounds. She was comatose and almost completely unresponsive when she arrived for treatment. Aquarium staff provided the equivalent of intravenous

fluids and gradually warmed Solstice, eventually reintroducing her to water. We were more confident in the likelihood of her recovery when she began feeding after about a week and a half. She is gaining weight quickly, feeding well and swimming vigorously, but continues to have air trapped under her shell that inhibits diving and requires special handling during transport. This condition is improving, however, and we expect full recovery and return to the wild when waters warm in Southern California this summer.

**5. What will happen to Solstice after her flight?**

She will be taken to a U.S. Navy base and transferred to specialists from SeaWorld San Diego. Her treatment and recovery will continue at SeaWorld, under permit by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with planned release date to the Pacific Ocean in July or August. The release date will occur when the ocean has warmed enough to ensure the best chance of a successful survival and return to the wild.

**6. Why do sea turtles strand on Oregon beaches so far from warmer water?**

We really do not know why turtles become stranded, and research is ongoing to try to determine the causes. There are several conditions common to stranded turtles in Oregon. Generally, stranded turtles are “hypothermic” or “cold-stunned” and cannot function normally. Often, other illness or injury stresses turtles making them unable to effectively respond in the cold water and return to warmer waters. Entanglement in fishing gear and marine debris, motorboat collisions or ingestion of non-food items such as plastic bags that resemble jelly fish (a turtle favorite), can all lead to injury and stress that can eventually cause stranding.

Strandings are often seen in late fall and early winter when ocean conditions are transitioning, possibly trapping turtles in colder waters. Severe storms and weather conditions can displace turtles northward as they follow currents or search for food. Turtles can get trapped in cold waters during these events. As cold water reduces body temperatures, they become less able to swim and feed, and more susceptible to ocean

and wind currents, and injury or illness. These factors can also eventually lead to stranding.

**7. Why do we rescue sea turtles in Oregon?**

All sea turtle species that strand on Oregon beaches are listed as threatened or endangered species and suffer a variety of threats including:

- destruction and alteration of nesting and feeding habitats
- incidental capture (bycatch) in commercial and recreational fisheries
- entanglement in or ingestion of marine debris
- vessel strikes

Returning an endangered species to the wild, particularly a breeding female like Solstice, is important to the future generations that those individuals will produce. The experience gained from treatment of these animals ensures that we will have the knowledge to respond to a more serious event, like an oil spill, in the future.

**8. How did the U.S. Coast Guard become involved in transporting a turtle?**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service requested the assistance of the U.S. Coast Guard with the transport, hoping that they would be able to include her transport in their training routine.

The U.S. Coast Guard is an environmental protection agency that works closely with the environmental protection community and other agencies involved in animal rescue. Sometimes aircraft, vessels, and personnel are available to help transport animals for treatment, relocation, or return to the wild in conjunction with other operations or required training missions.

**9. What should you do if you find a turtle or other sea animal stranded in an unnatural situation?**

Call the local authorities. The Oregon State Police, Wildlife Division can be reached at 1-800-452-7888, and the Marine Mammal Stranding

Network in Oregon, Washington, and California can be reached at 1-866-767-6114.

Important points to keep in mind:

- Sea turtles are listed and protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and wildlife laws of each state. All sea turtles, both dead and alive, are legally protected.
- Callers should be prepared to tell exactly where the turtle is located, whether it appears to be dead or alive, and the estimated weight of the animal or length of its shell to help responders estimate the number of people needed lift the turtle.
- If possible, stay near the animal to help orient officials and protect the turtle from scavengers.
- Due to the considerable travel distances that may be involved, and the possibility that another turtle stranding could occur at the same time, response can be delayed. Please be patient.
- Due to safety considerations, personnel may not travel at night to isolated unfamiliar areas.

## 10. What can I do to help sea turtles?

Besides notifying the authorities, one of the most important things we can do for sea turtles is to conserve our oceans. Here are some great resources to learn more about ocean conservation:

- National Geographic: [10 Things You Can Do to Save the Ocean](#)
- Smithsonian: [How You Can Help the Ocean](#)
- Many communities have local beach clean-up events. Check your local area for opportunities to volunteer. Statewide clean-ups are scheduled along the west coast in September:
  - In Oregon, SOLVE organizes beach cleanups twice a year. The next clean-up is September 19. More information can be found at [SOLVE Beach and Riverside Cleanup](#).
  - In Washington, CoastSavers organizes annual beach clean-ups, and the next one is April 25. More information can be found at [Washington CoastSavers](#).

- California Coastal Commission sponsors annual coast clean-ups, and the next event is September 19. More information can be found at [California Coastal Cleanup Day](#).