

press release

Rare and Rescued Sea Turtles Find Sanctuary at S.E.A. Aquarium

For the first time, aquarists at S.E.A. Aquarium welcomed and rehabilitated juvenile green and hawksbill turtles to its marine life collection; Rescued sea turtles make official debut on World Turtle Day in their new home at Shipwreck Habitat



Aquarists at S.E.A. Aquarium welcomed and rehabilitated two rescued turtles – a green sea turtle (left) and a hawksbill turtle (right) – to its marine life collection. The two threatened species made their official debut at the Shipwreck Habitat on World Turtle Day on 23 May. PHOTO CREDITS: RESORTS WORLD SENTOSA.

SINGAPORE, 23 May 2017 – For the first time, aquarists at S.E.A. Aquarium in Resorts World Sentosa welcomed and rehabilitated not one, but two rescued sea turtles to its marine life collection. After more than a year undergoing routine health checks, husbandry assessments and rehabilitation behind the scenes at the aquarium, the two threatened species finally made their official debut at the Shipwreck Habitat this morning, in celebration of World Turtle Day.

On 28 September 2015, a 20-gramme green sea turtle, listed as “Endangered” in the IUCN* Red List of Threatened Species, was handed over to S.E.A. Aquarium with the permission of the authorities from the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA). The healthy turtle, named “Louie” by the aquarists, was an approximately one-week-old hatchling when it arrived at the aquarium. A few months later, on 24 March 2016, S.E.A. Aquarium welcomed “Hawke”, a critically endangered male hawksbill turtle believed to be abandoned by his owner who had kept him illegally as a pet. Estimated to be between five to eight months old, Hawke had developed a pyramided carapace – a shell deformity likely attributed to poor nutrition and care.

Aquarists and the animal health team spared no effort in caring for the two young turtles. They have been feeding the turtles species-specific diets, monitoring their growth, measuring their body weights monthly

and observing their behaviours with other fishes in their temporary homes. Both turtles were gradually moved from separate, smaller homes at back-of-house areas to larger habitats where they could be slowly introduced to other species.

In addition to providing proper nutrition, housing and veterinary care, aquarists continue to build a bond with the turtles through a series of training which includes operant conditioning and positive reinforcement. Such training allows aquarists and vets to conduct veterinary and physical checks easily on the turtles to monitor their progress.

Mr Jason Horkin, Senior Vice President of Attractions at Resorts World Sentosa, said: “Here at S.E.A. Aquarium, we are dedicated to protecting marine life. We are honoured to be given the opportunity to welcome two rescued sea turtles into our collection and provide them with a safe sanctuary under expert care. Our aquarists have become foster parents and nursed both turtles back to top-swimming health. Sea turtles are amongst the ocean’s most iconic animals and by bringing visitors up close to these threatened species, we hope to deepen our impact on marine conservation and education, specifically in raising awareness on issues such as poaching, illegal wildlife trade and plastic pollution.”

In the time they have been at S.E.A. Aquarium, Louie the green sea turtle has grown to almost 12 kilogrammes, while Hawke the hawksbill turtle now weighs a healthy 17 kilogrammes. Named after the unusual greenish body fat stored underneath its shell, the green sea turtle can weigh more than 200 kilogrammes. Not particularly large compared to other sea turtles, hawksbills can weigh up to 70 kilogrammes and are so-named because of their tapered heads that end in a sharp point resembling a bird’s beak.

Both Louie and Hawke now share their new home at the Shipwreck Habitat with other compatible species such as the pompano, threadfin trevally and the shark ray – another threatened species born and raised successfully at S.E.A. Aquarium. This provides inter-species interaction which is a good form of enrichment for the animals, and allows visitors to witness the dynamics of marine life. S.E.A. Aquarium is open to exploring the possibility of a release in partnership with the relevant authorities in the future, but this requires careful consideration taking into account key concerns including the suitability of wild habitats and poaching which must be thoroughly addressed to ensure their survival in the wild.

There are seven different species of sea turtles: green, hawksbill, Kemp's ridley, olive ridley, leatherback, loggerhead and flatback. Of the seven species, six** are considered threatened according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Worldwide, sea turtles face many threats, primarily from humans, including injuries from boat propellers, entanglement in fishing nets, plastic pollution and poaching for eggs, meat, skin and shells.



In addition to meeting the two new residents, visitors exploring the aquarium in the upcoming weeks can expect a series of educational activities held in celebration of World Oceans Day on 8 June. These include the launch of a National Geographic exhibition titled “Ocean Soul” featuring stunning images taken by renowned photojournalist Brian Skerry who specialises in underwater environments. There will also be daily storytelling sessions for visitors to learn more about marine conservation, interactive booths highlighting the impact of plastic pollution, and informative sessions on how to reduce plastic usage.

**IUCN – International Union for Conservation of Nature*

***Flatbacks are currently not listed as threatened in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species due to insufficient data collection*

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ABOUT S.E.A. AQUARIUM

Opened in November 2012, S.E.A. Aquarium at Resorts World Sentosa is one of the world's largest aquariums home to more than 100,000 marine animals from across 800 species. Featuring 49 habitats, S.E.A. Aquarium exhibits close to 80 threatened species including the manta ray, Clarion angelfish and a variety of beautiful corals that mirror a pristine aquatic environment. Through interactive programmes, up-close animal encounters and immersive learning journeys, S.E.A. Aquarium aims to inspire visitors to protect the world's oceans.

S.E.A. Aquarium collaborates with local and regional partners in marine conservation projects and is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA).

ABOUT RESORTS WORLD SENTOSA

Resorts World Sentosa (RWS), Asia's premium lifestyle destination resort, is located on Singapore's resort island of Sentosa. Spanning 49 hectares, RWS is home to four world-class attractions including Universal Studios Singapore, S.E.A. Aquarium, Dolphin Island and Adventure Cove Waterpark. Other attractions include the Asian flagship of a world-renowned destination spa, a casino, six unique hotels and the Resorts World Convention Centre. With the most number of Michelin stars in one destination, RWS offers award-winning dining experiences at renowned celebrity chef restaurants, establishing itself as a key player in Singapore's vibrant and diverse dining scene. The integrated resort also offers world-class entertainment, from original resident productions to concerts and public shows such as the Crane Dance and the Lake of Dreams. RWS has been named "Best Integrated Resort" since 2011 for six consecutive years at the TTG Travel Awards which recognises the best of Asia-Pacific's travel industry.

RWS is wholly owned by Genting Singapore, a company of the Genting Group. For more information, please visit www.rwsentosa.com.

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Note to Editors

1. Photos and video of the sea turtles can be downloaded from <https://app.box.com/v/seaturtles>
2. All photos and video are to be attributed to **Resorts World Sentosa**



Aquarists at S.E.A. Aquarium carries out “positive reinforcement operant conditioning” with Louie the green sea turtle. They start by teaching Louie to ‘target’ or touch the striped end of a PVC pipe by placing it in front of him and rewarding him with food once he touches it. Over time, Louie has been conditioned to associate the pipe with food and swims to it easily. This conditioned behaviour makes it easier for aquarists and vets to conduct physical and/or veterinary checks when necessary.



An aquarist at S.E.A. Aquarium carrying Louie the green sea turtle for its monthly weighing. Aquarists have been feeding the turtles species-specific diets, monitoring their growth, measuring their body weights and observing their behaviours with other fishes in their new home.



On 24 March 2016, S.E.A. Aquarium welcomed “Hawke”, a critically endangered hawksbill turtle believed to be abandoned by his owner who had kept him illegally as a pet. Hawke had developed a pyramided carapace – a shell deformity likely attributed to poor nutrition and care. Aquarists have been providing proper care and nutrition for the turtle, but as with most cases of pyramided carapaces, such development is irreversible, causing the shell to retain its bumpy appearance.



Both Louie and Hawke (pictured left) now share their new home at the Shipwreck Habitat with other compatible species such as the pompano, threadfin trevally and the threatened shark ray. This provides inter-species interaction which is a good form of enrichment for the animals, and allows visitors to witness the dynamics of marine life.