

NEWS

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<http://www.shorenwstoday.com/snt/news/index.php/cape-may-county/26185--vet-mechanic-repairs-injured-turtles-using-dental-tools-.html>



We were pleased to discover that Dr. Logan used Jet Acrylics as his repair material.

Thank you, Dr. Logan, for your dedication to all species—we are truly inspired.



Dr. Mark Logan



Repaired Turtle Shell

'Vet Tech' Repairs Injured Turtles Using Dental Tools

Original Post Date: Saturday, 16 June 2012 02:48

By Cindy Nevitt

CAPE MAY COUNTY, NJ—Dr. Mark Logan is a lot like the turtles he saves: His outer shell appears tough until it's cracked.

"He's very businesslike until you get to the animal lover underneath," said a Wetlands Institute volunteer who asked not to be named. "He really cares about the turtles."

Logan, who operates Baysea Veterinary Hospital in Rio Grande and calls himself a "veterinary mechanic," is New Jersey's only known turtle repairman. His dedication to diamondback terrapins spans a quarter-century and has involved repairing the shells of at least 1,000 of the reptiles.

"I found it interesting," Logan said of his introduction to treating injured turtles while he was an associate working at another veterinary practice in 1985. "It was something I could do and I was successful."

It didn't hurt that his wife was then director of education at the Wetlands Institute in Middle Township, located outside Stone Harbor, and that the nature facility started a terrapin conservation program of its own in 1989. It wasn't long before Logan became the go-to guy for repairing turtle shells, perfecting a procedure that saves the lives of injured reptiles and by extension their future offspring.

By his estimation, his work in conjunction with the Wetlands program has been responsible for bringing between 10,000 and 15,000 eggs or baby turtles into the ecosystem, helping to preserve the diamondback terrapin population.

Photos Available
by Cindy Nevitt

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Dan McLaughlin, coordinator of research and conservation at the Wetlands, said that for every terrapin that is saved, hundreds more are given a chance. Terrapins, which are known to live 30 years, with data showing they can live to 40, lay an average of two clutches of 10 eggs apiece each year. Therefore, given time to reach reproductive age, one turtle can represent as many as 600 more turtles.

Multiply that by the average of 500 dead terrapins McLaughlin and his staff of 15 interns pick up annually during nesting season between late May and mid-July, and the number of lost turtles leaps into the hundreds of thousands.

“Even removing one turtle from the ecosystem can have a significant impact,” McLaughlin said.

Although he protests “I am not a turtle expert, and I am not a specialist,” Logan said he is “the only vet who does this” and admitted he receives phone calls from central and northern New Jersey facilities seeking his advice in treating turtle injuries.

In 2005, in recognition of 20 years of volunteer work repairing turtles during his lunch breaks and after normal business hours, Logan received the Conservation Award from the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce.

Open Wide. This Won't Hurt A Bit

Logan's turtle-saving procedure, which he has honed through experimentation with different techniques, relies heavily on dental tools. He uses a dental elevator to leverage the broken halves of the shell together, and occasionally uses a high-speed dental drill to drill holes in the turtle's shell so that he can wire the halves together and stabilize the area in need of patching.

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Using dental acrylic, the same material used by orthodontists to create retainers, Logan primes the borders of the crack in the shell and then builds a “bridge” across the break. If a piece of the shell is missing, he will apply bio-absorbable mesh to the area first, essentially creating a long-term Band-Aid over the wound. If there is damage to the soft tissue beneath, he will apply silvadene cream, a topical antibiotic that is used in preventing skin infections in burn victims.

“Reptiles don’t have the neurological receptors we do,” Logan said as to whether turtles feel pain. “They certainly don’t anticipate pain the way we do.”

With their bodies in what he called “disarray,” Logan said repairing the turtles’ shells is the humane thing to do. “They seem to be a lot more comfortable once their shells are back together,” he said.

Turtles brought into the Wetlands are triaged under the guidance of Dr. Roger Wood. Those with no significant damage are returned to a safe area in the marsh. Turtles in need of fracture reduction and repair are delivered to Logan, and are then released into the marsh or rehabilitated at the Wetlands or in the biology lab at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. Those beyond repair have any viable eggs harvested in the hopes of incubating the eggs to the point of hatching. According to a display at the Turtle Station at the Wetlands, an average of one in three eggs eventually hatches, and of those, one in three hatchlings generally survives once released.

What You Can Do To Protect Turtles

McLaughlin said terrapins are unique in that they are the only known turtle species to live their entire lives in the salt marshes. Drivers in Cape May County should expect to see them on the roads during nesting season and should slow down, he said.

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If it is possible to stop safely, drivers should put on their hazard lights and ascertain that other drivers are aware of what they are doing before exiting their vehicles. A turtle should be carefully grasped from the rear and carried across the street in the direction it was heading, and set down gently in the grass on the side of the road.

“Before human development of coastal barrier islands, terrapins nested in the dunes,” said McLaughlin, a 2003 Ocean City High School graduate and Seaville native who is in his third year with the Wetlands terrapin conservation program. “Development along the barrier islands has forced female turtles to find alternative places to nest.”

McLaughlin’s staff drives a 38-mile transect four times a day from Stone Harbor to Avalon to Sea Isle City to Strathmere to Ocean City’s southernmost end, stopping to help turtles across the road and picking up injured turtles. Between 400 and 600 dead turtles are removed from the roads each year, McLaughlin said. The Wetlands’ website reports 230 dead turtles have been recovered as of June 13 (not quite halfway through the seven-week nesting season), and 167 have been saved.

If you come across a turtle nesting, McLaughlin advises quietly observing it from a distance. “Turtles can be frightened and abandon the nest,” he said. “Let nature stay wild. Let them do what they do.”

While often inaccurately described as endangered, the diamondback terrapin is considered “a species of special concern,” McLaughlin said, which means its population status is unknown. All turtle species are protected in New Jersey, where it is illegal to keep a turtle in captivity or as a pet.

The Wetlands will accept injured turtles from the public during operating

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hours. Eggs can be harvested from dead turtles within a narrow window of time. Once the tissue dies, the eggs die. See www.wetlandsinstitute.org or call (609) 368-1211 for more information.

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