



## Sea turtles stunned by cold, warmed by helping hands

By JESSICA CRAFT, Coastal Planning & Engineering

Staff from Coastal Planning & Engineering (CPE), a coastal engineering firm located in Boca Raton, FL, provided volunteers and donated needed supplies over the Jan. 15 weekend to Gumbo Limbo Nature Center. The Rehabilitation Center, usually equipped to care for only seven or eight sick or injured sea turtles, has taken in over 130 of the cold-stunned animals since the cold-temperature crisis began and was running low on supplies.

The quick drop in temperature and unusually long duration of the cold front that overtook Florida recently caused huge numbers of sea turtles along the state's coastline to float to the sur-

Above: Coastal Planning & Engineering staff delivers supplies to sea turtle research staff at Gumbo Limbo Nature Center. Left to right: Tom Pierro (CPE), Dr. Kirt Rusenko (GLNC), Jessica Craft (CPE), Nicole Sharp (CPE), Rick Newman (GLNC), Heather Ionnazzi (GLNC) and Michelle Rees (CPE). Below: Nicole Sharp (left) and Stacy Prekel (right), staff from Coastal Planning & Engineering, help prepare food for the center's wildlife.



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## Turtles

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face of lagoons and coastal waterways. Sea turtles are reptiles and don't generate their own body heat; therefore, when the temperature outside drops suddenly, the animals' own body temperatures can drop perilously low, causing them to go into cold shock. When this happens, sea turtles become immobilized and float to the surface, putting them at a heightened risk of being struck by boats. The condition can also suppress their immune systems, making the creatures vulnerable to a variety of diseases including pneumonia.

Over 5,000 cold-stunned sea turtles have been rescued throughout the state, with approximately 2,300 coming from the waterways around Merritt Island. These rescued turtles are divvied up between various rehabilitation centers throughout Florida, including the one at Gumbo Limbo Nature Center in Boca Raton. Being designed to house only a few animals at one time, the huge influx of cold-stunned turtles has put a strain on the facility's resources, and funds are rapidly dwindling. In response, CPE staff delivered approximately \$1,000 in supplies on Friday, including basic medical supplies as well as nebulizers used for treating pneumonia in the sick reptiles.



A rescued juvenile green sea turtle exhibiting fibropapillomatosis, a debilitating disease linked to pollution. The disease is thought to be contagious, and Gumbo Limbo Nature Center is one of the only centers in the state willing to take in affected turtles.

Over the weekend volunteers also aided in food preparation for the animals.

Although the flow of debilitated sea turtles has slowed with rising temperatures, cold-stunned turtles are still arriving on a daily basis and the Center still needs help. Coastal Planning & Engi-

neering urges concerned citizens to make a donation to the Gumbo Limbo facility.

Please contact Gumbo Limbo Nature Center at 561-391-8110 or visit [http://gumbolimbo.org/ee/news/comments/news\\_blog/we\\_need\\_your\\_help/](http://gumbolimbo.org/ee/news/comments/news_blog/we_need_your_help/) for more information. ❖