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GREEN SEA TURTLE RESCUED FROM COMBERS BEACH CURRENTLY TREATED AT VANCOUVER AQUARIUM

VANCOUVER, BC—The Vancouver Aquarium is currently treating a rare patient—a green sea turtle that was rescued off Combers Beach in Pacific Rim National Park Reserve on November 30, 2011. With the help of Parks Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the turtle was brought to the Vancouver Aquarium hospital where staff veterinarian, Dr. Martin Haulena, and his team are providing treatment to the young male turtle. This is the second sea turtle to be rescued in one week.

The turtle was discovered stranded on the beach by a park visitor on Wednesday, November 30. The visitor alerted park staff who examined the turtle and immediately met with members of Fisheries and Oceans Canada's Marine Mammal Response Network. The Network staff picked up the turtle for a transfer to the Vancouver Aquarium early last night.

Once the animal was admitted to the Aquarium's hospital, the team provided emergency treatment including fluids and antibiotics and assessed the eye injuries to the turtle. An electrocardiogram and ultrasound were performed to look for a heartbeat.

Reptiles have a very interesting cardiovascular system and heart activity alone cannot provide confirmation of life. Conversely, in cold-stunned sea turtle cases the metabolic rate may be very depressed and a heart beat is extremely difficult to detect in a live animal. "There was very little heart activity when the turtle arrived at the Aquarium yesterday but, because cold-stunned sea turtles can have a very faint heart beat, it is too early to pronounce a clear diagnosis," says Dr. Haulena. "This morning, there were a few rare but very distinct electrical patterns suggestive of a heart beat and the eyes appear to have rehydrated. The next 24 hours will be critical."

At this moment, the prognosis remains very poor. "The goal is to very slowly increase the turtle's body temperature by about one to two degrees per day and look for any indication that recovery may be possible," adds Dr. Haulena. "We will repeat the fluids, monitor electrical activity in the heart, and hope for the best."

Last week, an olive ridley sea turtle was found in the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve and was declared dead the next day. "It is very unusual to see sea turtles in our Canadian waters at this time of year," explains Dr. Dennis Thoney, director of animal operations at the Vancouver Aquarium. "Sea turtle strandings tend to be more common in B.C. during El Nino years when waters are warmer. It is unusual to find them stranded during a La Nina year when the waters are cool. Therefore, it is not clear how these animals ended up in B.C."

The olive ridley and green sea turtles are both threatened species. Reports of dead, injured, distressed marine mammals and sea turtles should be reported to the Marine Mammal Response Network hotline at 1-800-465-4336. Any sightings of live, free swimming sea turtle and cetaceans should be reported to the Vancouver Aquarium's BC Cetacean Sightings Network at 1-866-ISAWONE.

About the Vancouver Aquarium

The Vancouver Aquarium is a recognized leader in connecting people to our natural world, and a self-supporting, non-profit association dedicated to effecting the conservation of aquatic life through display, communications, public programs, education, research, and direct action. Learn more at www.vanaqua.org

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Footage and stills are available for media use upon request.

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