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Volunteers rescue sea turtle

300-pounder trapped itself in tidal pool

Published Thu, Jun 29, 2006

By SANDRA WALSH
The Beaufort Gazette

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A group of Harbor Islanders out searching the beach for turtle nests got more than they bargained for Tuesday morning when they found a 300-pound loggerhead turtle stuck in a tidal pool.

But finding the loggerhead proved to be the easiest part of their day.

Harbor Island Sea Turtle Preservation Project volunteers attempted to lift the female loggerhead to no avail, according to Chad Denney, project head and maintenance supervisor for the island.

"There were seven of us out there and we couldn't lift her, we couldn't move her," Denney said of the turtle, the biggest he has seen on the island. "So, I called DNR and they said to use a tarp."

Using the tarp, Denney and four volunteers scooted the turtle back to safety.

Rebecca Bass, a project volunteer, said that the turtle swam away immediately after hitting the ocean.

"There wasn't a dry eye in the place, I can tell you that," Bass said of the emotional experience.



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A female loggerhead turtle is rolled onto a tarp after she was trapped near Harbor Island beach.

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Seven volunteers were unable to lift the turtle off the beach.

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Volunteers typically scour the beach each morning from between May and September during loggerhead nesting season in search of nests in need of relocation.

Denney said he believes that the turtle probably nested that morning during high tide and later got disoriented.

Sally Murphy, a biologist with the state who specializes in endangered species, including loggerhead turtles, said loggerheads, whose vision has been described as looking through wax paper, depend on moonlight reflected on the ocean to guide them on course.

"She probably saw the glare from the tidal pool and got stuck in it," Murphy said. "The thing about loggerheads is, once they get into the water, they don't come out."

Murphy said that beached loggerheads are usually found dead or near death.

Most loggerhead deaths in the area are caused by boat strikes and "barnacle bill," a condition that leaves a turtle emaciated and covered in barnacles and algae.

Denney said that about a month ago, he found a turtle dead on the beach that he believes was hit by a boat propeller.

Two years ago, he found an emaciated juvenile turtle that was transported by DNR to the South Carolina Aquarium's basement turtle hospital in Charleston, where the turtle was brought back to health within a year and released back into the ocean.

Contact Sandra Walsh at 986-5538 or swalsh@beaufortgazette.com. To comment: beaufortgazette.com.

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