

82 healthy sea turtles hatch at San Diego SeaWorld

November 3 2009, By SUE MANNING , Associated Press Writer



This Oct. 7, 2009 photo provided by SeaWorld San Diego shows sea turtle hatchlings transferred to a holding pool at SeaWorld San Diego. The population of endangered green sea turtles at SeaWorld grew by 82 in October when the eggs hatched on Shipwreck Beach without human help. (AP Photo/SeaWorld San Diego, Bob Couey)

(AP) -- The population of endangered green sea turtles at SeaWorld in San Diego grew by 82 in October when the eggs hatched on Shipwreck Beach without human help.

There hasn't been such happy turtle news at SeaWorld since 2003, when 21 [sea turtles](#) got an assist from park staff, said Tim Downing, assistant curator of fishes.

This time, the park let nature take its course and didn't incubate the eggs.

The babies started poking through their ping pong-sized eggs on Oct. 5. Since then, they have been getting a diet of squid, krill, shrimp and special pellets.

The birth of the baby turtles was announced Monday. Downing said they are in excellent health and should go on display at the park before the end of the year.

It will be up to the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine whether the new turtles stay at SeaWorld and whether they will allow the turtles to mate again next year, he said.

SeaWorld has 30 adult sea turtles in its collection, including three green females and one male. They have all been at the park since the 1960s so they are around 40 or 50 years old, or middle age for the creatures, which live to be well past 100 years.

SeaWorld's green sea turtles have reached [sexual maturity](#) and all three females may have buried eggs in the sand on the park's Shipwreck Beach, Downing said.

They have to do [genetic testing](#) to determine whether one turtle laid all the eggs or there were multiple mothers, he said, and SeaWorld crews have to dig up the beach to determine how many eggs failed to hatch.

"There is so much that is not known about sea turtles," Downing said. "We are getting real good information on the growth rate of juveniles."

A female turtle mates in the water, comes up high on the sand, digs a few false holes to fool predators, then digs a nest and lays between 100 and 120 eggs, Downing said. The eggs incubate for three months, with the gender of each baby being determined by the temperature of the

sand.

The park doesn't name its animals, but the turtles have pit tags and flipper tags, Downing said.

The babies weigh just a few grams now, but when they become adults in 20 years or so, they will weigh about 250 pounds.

"They are all gaining weight and doing well. We have done some X-rays, and they are progressing just like we would expect them to," Downing said.

There are seven species of sea turtles in the world and they are all endangered or threatened, Downing said.

"The biggest reason they don't live that long in the wild is mankind," he said. They are fished in some parts of the world, and pollution hurts.

"For example, a trash bag looks like a jellyfish. They eat it and it gets impacted in their gut and they starve to death," Downing said.

On the Net: SeaWorld, <http://www.SeaWorld.com/SanDiego>

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