

Artificial legs boost limbless loggerhead turtle

February 12 2013



Yu, a female loggerhead turtle, swims after receiving her 27th pair of artificial front legs at the Suma Aqualife Park in Kobe on February 12, 2013. Yu lost her front legs during a shark attack. The rubber limbs are attached to a vest slipped over her head, said the aquarium's curator, Naoki Kamezaki.

A sea turtle that lost her front legs to a shark attack was bidding to match "Blade Runner" Oscar Pistorius on Tuesday, as she donned the latest in artificial flipper technology in Japan.

Yu, an approximately 25-year-old female [loggerhead turtle](#), was test-

driving her 27th pair of artificial front legs around her home aquarium near Kobe in western Japan, where she proves a draw for the crowds.

The rubber limbs are attached to a vest slipped over her head, said the aquarium's curator, Naoki Kamezaki.

"We have worked hard to design the vest in a way that prevents the turtle from taking it off unwittingly," he told AFP. "It can flutter the limbs as the vest is soft."



Yu, an approximately 25-year-old female loggerhead turtle, receives her 27th pair of artificial front legs at the Suma Aqualife Park in Kobe on February 12, 2013. Yu lost her front legs during a shark attack.

The creature, which weighs 96 kilogrammes (212 pounds) and has a

shell 82 centimetres (32 inches) long, was pulled out of a fisherman's net and sent to the Suma Aqualife Park in mid-2008.

One third of the right limb and half of the left limb were gone, in what Kamezaki believes must have been a [shark attack](#).

The aquarium started developing artificial limbs for the animal in late 2008 as it could swim only at about 60 percent of its normal speed.

Earlier versions were squeezed into the stumps but were apparently painful to Yu.

"Similar attempts have been made to attach artificial limbs to turtles around the world. But we have not heard if they went well," said Kamezaki, an expert on [sea turtles](#), whose surname coincidentally means "turtle cape" in Japanese.

"Ours may be the only case in which a turtle with [artificial limbs](#) is still swimming without a problem."

In 2004, a dolphin at an aquarium in [Okinawa](#), southern Japan, became the first in the world to be fitted with a rubber tail fin. It lost its own tail due to illness.

South African sprint king Pistorius, whose legs were amputated below his knees, won plaudits for his performance at last year's London Olympics where he competed alongside able-bodied athletes.

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