

# Acupuncture helps ailing alligator in Brazil (Update)

August 28 2013, by Ana Pereira

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Bino, the albino alligator, receives acupuncture treatment in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Tuesday, Aug 27, 2013. Veterinarians at the Sao Paulo aquarium have found a novel treatment for Bino, who suffers from hunchback and scoliosis: acupuncture. Once a week, several needles are inserted into Bino's back and the treatment is working. He's already able to twitch his tail again and move his back legs, which until recently he was unable to do. (AP Photo/Ana Pereira)

Bino's back was killing him. He was suffering from scoliosis. He couldn't move his legs, two of them anyway, and his tail just wouldn't

swish.

What's an albino alligator in that sort of health bind to do? Acupuncture, naturally.

Bino the albino alligator lives at the Sao Paulo Aquarium, where he's been since 2007. Veterinarians said Wednesday that he was born eight years ago with his ailments, and nothing seemed to alleviate them.

So, in early 2011 veterinarians decided to see if acupuncture might help Bino, as it has other animals living at the aquarium.

"The acupuncture will ... alleviate his pain and keep all his vital functions going," said Rafael Gutierrez, a biologist at the aquarium of Sao Paulo, adding that the 30-minute weekly treatments would continue indefinitely, as long as they kept showing solid results.

Acupuncture on animals is becoming increasingly common around the globe, the biologists at the Sao Paulo aquarium said, especially with pets such as cats, dogs and horses. The use of acupuncture on animals began thousands of years ago in China.

In the U.S., the number of veterinarians who hold membership in the American Academy of Veterinary Acupuncture has jumped 50 percent in the last few years to 900 doctors, said Simon Flynn, the executive director of the academy that's based in Glastonbury, Connecticut.

"There are many zoo veterinarians who use acupuncture, a number of equine practitioners who treat race horses with acupuncture, it's proven to be a useful treatment," Flynn said. "It's common with dogs and it's becoming increasingly common with cats. More veterinarians are seeing the worth of the treatment."

Typical ailments treated by acupuncture include neck and back issues, skin problems and pain in general, among other complaints, said Flynn.

Bino the Sao Paulo alligator requires a few precautions not needed with your average house cat. Inserting the needles into Bino's back requires the important first step of taping shut his lock-tight jaws full of sharp teeth.

Bino wrestles around a bit as the tape is applied, but soon calms down.

Veterinarian Daniela Cervaletti then slides behind Bino, firmly pressing the needles into his leathery white and yellow hide. The needles are inserted along his spine and around the area where the animal developed a hunchback.

Bino doesn't move at all as nearly a dozen needles go in.

Cervaletti gently strokes the side of Bino's neck after she applies them all, then waits several minutes before removing them.

The treatment complete, handlers help Bino back into a display pool, his white skin stark against brown fake rocks painted with foliage.

He moves easily and swishes his tail, gliding along the water as a gaggle of young schoolchildren in matching blue and gray uniforms squeal in delight, faces pressed up against the glass separating them from Bino.

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