

Texas biologists warm chilled sea turtles

December 7 2014

(AP)—Marine biologists have flown dozens of endangered sea turtles from Cape Cod, Massachusetts, to Galveston, Texas, for treatment of hypothermia.

The 50 Kemp's ridley [sea turtles](#), a [critically endangered species](#), were shocked by recent cold temperatures in the waters off New England in the northeastern U.S. and were rescued from the beaches of Cape Cod over the past few weeks, the Galveston County Daily News reported.

The group arrived Friday at the Galveston Sea Turtle Facility operated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. There, the turtles will be slowly warmed to a safe temperature and treated for infections, frostbite and other health problems, program manager Ben Higgins said.

"They're not in great shape," he said.

Cold-stunned turtles don't drown, but they do stop moving and eating. Eventually, they're washed ashore where they often die. The beaching is an annual event, but more turtles have washed ashore this year than in previous years, Higgins said.

Since Nov. 3, more than 1,000 turtles have been beached in Massachusetts, more than half of them still alive when rescued. That has overwhelmed the resources of the New England Aquarium in Boston, which usually treats the beached turtles.

Besides Galveston, the aquarium has sent turtles to more than a dozen other U.S. rehabilitation centers, including some in Pittsburgh, Washington, D.C., and Orlando, Florida.

"We're always here and available and always have space to deal with large sea turtle events," Higgins said.

This is not the first time the NOAA sea turtle center in Galveston has rendered aid to hypothermic turtles. It also has treated turtles brought in from Louisiana after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Once the [turtles](#) recover at the Galveston center, they will be released offshore next spring, Higgins said.

Efforts to protect the Kemp's ridley sea turtle had boosted their population by 12 percent to 17 percent a year. But in 2010, the year of the oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, the turtle's numbers began to fall precipitously.

Scientists at a recent symposium in Brownsville, Texas, reported the number of nests made by the endangered sea turtle in Mexico has fallen by 40 percent to 50 percent, with a similar dropoff in Texas.

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