

LSU veterinarians get Pedro the turtle moving

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Pedro the Turtle Credit: LSU Vet School

Pedro the turtle has learned to roll with it, thanks to the zoological medicine service at the LSU School of Veterinary Medicine's Veterinary Teaching Hospital. When Pedro, an adult male box turtle, was adopted by his owners, he was missing one of his back legs. But after recently

escaping from his outdoor enclosure, he was missing the other rear leg.

"Unfortunately, several months ago, he escaped. His owners hadn't seen him for several months. Then when he finally returned, he was missing the last back leg now," said Kelly Rockwell, DVM, a zoological medicine intern in the LSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital.

Pedro's owner, Sandra Traylor, brought him to LSU.

"I was impressed by the interest they showed in a box turtle. Sometimes people have this idea that pets are just cats and dogs. It's very strange to walk in with a turtle and sit next to a dog, but they were very good about it and they were very nice," Traylor said.

The veterinarians found nothing medically wrong with Pedro.

"The wound had already healed quite well and he managed to get back on his own with his front legs somehow. Without his back legs, he's a little less mobile. As a box turtle, he can still 'box up' and protect himself that way, but due to his weakened mobility, the owners decided to make him a permanent indoor turtle," Rockwell said. "Since they opted to keep him inside, I was talking to Dr. Mark Mitchell, the clinician working that week, and we thought in order to make him more mobile, we could add a prosthetic of some sort. We talked about 3-D printing something, or we could try to make him wheels."

Using a Lego car kit, Rockwell and LSU veterinary student Sarah Mercer came up with the best way to attach the wheels to Pedro.

"We had the whole zoo med service and all of the students helping. We had to make the axles long enough to fit his body. We also made it so they could come off to clean Pedro. We had to try a couple of things to fit him. We used epoxy to attach Pedro. The same epoxy that's used on

horseshoes," Rockwell said.

A fourth-year veterinarian student from Mt. Pleasant, S.C., Mercer said she'll never forget the experience of using Legos to help an animal in need.

"Vet school can be hard at times, but sitting on the floor with my classmates and mentors all laughing in delight as we watched Pedro roll around for the first time, that was a moment of pure joy," Mercer said.

In addition to epoxy, other equipment was needed as well to give Pedro his prosthetics.

"Syringe cases were used to hold the axles together and then we cut some pieces down to size to fit him," Rockwell said. "I love zoo med. It gives me an opportunity to be very creative with my job. We get a chance to be really creative as doctors to help these animals live a great quality of life."

Pedro's owners are thrilled with the results.

"He's taken to the wheels with absolutely no problem. He adjusted right away to them. He backs up, he turns, goes back and forth," Traylor said. "He, overall, is a pretty happy camper after all he went through. It's like a science class but better because you're living it."

Provided by Louisiana State University

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