

Ancient sea turtle housed at Boston aquarium for more than 50 years passes another physical

April 9 2024, by PATRICK WHITTLE and RODRIQUE NGOWI



New England Aquarium staff and visitors looking at Myrtle as the massive sea turtle rests in a crate after being hoisted out of a giant ocean tank before a performed a medical examination in Boston, Tuesday, April 9, 2024. Myrtle, who's around 90 years old and weighs almost a quarter of a ton, underwent a medical examination that included blood draws as well as eye, mouth and a physical examination to ensure the creature remains in good health. (AP Photo/Rodrique Ngowi) Credit: AP Photo/Rodrique Ngowi

Apparently, it's pretty easy being green after all. That was the takeaway from Tuesday's physical examination of Myrtle, an ancient green sea turtle that has delighted visitors to the New England Aquarium in Boston for more than 50 years.

Veterinarians performed Myrtle's checkup after the 500-pound reptile was hoisted from the aquarium's Giant Ocean Tank in an enormous crate on a chain. Watching the humungous turtle elevated from the tank in a way that resembled the way a piano is lifted outside a building provided some of the aquarium patrons with an unexpected thrill.

Myrtle is thought to be up to 95 years old, which would place her just beyond the upper boundaries of the species' longevity. But the big turtle is "in robust condition" despite her advanced age, said Mike O'Neill, manager of the ocean tank.

There's every reason to believe Myrtle will stick around for years to come, O'Neill said.

"She is iconic," O'Neill said. "One of the really special things we see is parents with their kids who say, 'This is Myrtle, she has been here since when I was a kid.' She has this multigenerational impact, which is really special."

Giving the massive sea turtle a physical exam is no small feat, and it happens about twice per year. First, a team of divers shepherded Myrtle into the underwater crate, which was lifted from the water by a winch. The process took place during open hours at the aquarium, and dozens of onlookers watched as Myrtle was brought to a deck for the exam.



Myrtle, a green sea turtle, swims past New England Aquarium divers preparing to get into and extract the creature from the Giant Ocean Tank exhibit for a medical examination in Boston, Tuesday, April 9, 2024. Myrtle, who's around 90 years old and weighs almost a quarter of a ton, underwent a medical examination that included blood draws as well as eye, mouth and a physical examination to ensure the creature remains in good health. Credit: AP Photo/Rodrique Ngowi



New England Aquarium staff hold to restrain Myrtle to prevent the massive sea turtle from injuring a veterinarian performing a medical examination in Boston, Tuesday, April 9, 2024. Myrtle, who's around 90 years old and weighs almost a quarter of a ton, underwent a medical examination that included blood draws as well as eye, mouth and a physical examination to ensure the creature remains in good health. Credit: AP Photo/Rodrique Ngowi



Myrtle, a green sea turtle, swims past New England Aquarium divers preparing to get into and extract the creature from the Giant Ocean Tank exhibit for a medical examination in Boston, Tuesday, April 9, 2024. Myrtle, who's around 90 years old and weighs almost a quarter of a ton, underwent a medical examination that included blood draws as well as eye, mouth and a physical examination to ensure the creature remains in good health. Credit: AP Photo/Rodrique Ngowi



Myrtle, a green sea turtle estimated to be almost 90 years old, swims in the main tank at the New England Aquarium, April 22, 2016, in Boston. Veterinarians performed Myrtle's check up Tuesday, April 9, 2024, after the 500-pound reptile was hoisted from the aquarium's Giant Ocean Tank in an enormous crate on a chain. Myrtle is thought to be as many as 95 years old, which would place her just beyond the upper boundaries of the species' longevity, but aquarium staff said the big turtle is in robust condition despite her advance age. Credit: AP Photo/Bill Sikes, File

Next, a team of veterinarians, vet techs and aquarists worked together to draw blood from Myrtle, check her flippers for range of motion and make sure her eyes, mouth and nose were in working order. Aquarium staff assured curious children that the turtle was in no danger—and that the veterinarians were trained professionals safe from her powerful jaws.

Myrtle then received an ultrasound, her weight was taken, and she returned to the ocean tank, O'Neill said. The turtle was back in the ocean tank munching on lettuce and cabbage by late morning on Tuesday.

Myrtle has been visited by about 50 million people over the decades and has gotten used to humans in that time. The aquarium's website boasts that Myrtle, who arrived from another aquarium in 1970, "loves having her shell scratched."

Green sea turtles are the second-largest species of sea turtle, and they live in tropical and subtropical oceans around the world. The International Union for Conservation of Nature lists them as endangered and decreasing in population.

Myrtle shares space with a pair of loggerhead sea turtles named Carolina and Retread who are about half her age and size. The aquatic roommates also received physicals on Tuesday and are "also both doing great," O'Neill said.

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Citation: Ancient sea turtle housed at Boston aquarium for more than 50 years passes another physical (2024, April 9) retrieved 21 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-04-ancient-sea-turtle-housed-boston.html>

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