

# Viera Voice

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Sea turtle scans: Rockledge  
Regional steps in to help  
Brevard Zoo rescues

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Rockledge Regional Medical Center

A lot of people set foot in Rockledge Regional Medical Center each day. On Monday, several patients set flippers there, too.

A group of rescued turtles — all guests of the Brevard Zoo’s Sea Turtle Healing Center — came to the hospital for CT scans after the zoo’s own equipment went down. The nonprofit center helps turtles with health issues, including injuries from fishing line, plastics, and boat propellers. The scans help diagnose the extent of these injuries and reveal other maladies.

When the zoo’s CT scanner experienced some problems, the Brevard Zoo’s sea turtle program manager, Shannon Gann, started calling around to area imaging centers and hospitals to see if anyone could help.

“This was a unique opportunity to partner with the community and we jumped at the chance to support the zoo and help the turtles get urgent diagnostic workups,” said Jay Greer, director of radiology at Rockledge Regional. The reptiles arrived within a few hours. They included “Canaveral,” a young loggerhead with apparent boat-strike injuries. The hospital staff also checked for tumors on some young green turtles: “Mousse,” “Cheesecake” and “Thin Mint.”

“A turtle’s shell is composed of material a lot like our fingernails,” said Greer. “Regular x-rays would not provide the detail the zoo needed, so a CT scan was necessary. Of course, we had to do all the proper infection control, but we turned it around pretty fast.”

The sea turtles’ benign tumors can grow inside and outside the body, the result of the fibropapilloma virus. Zoo staff can remove tumors with a carbon dioxide laser if the turtle is considered a good candidate for surgery. While an external examination reveals tumors on the outside, a CT scan is necessary to locate any internal growths.

Greer said the turtles went through some of the same procedures as humans when they undergo a scan, including a sedative and an intravenous contrast to highlight details inside the body.

The zoo intends to release these animals after they recover.

Greer said that the opportunity to help these endearing creatures was rewarding. “It was just awesome being able to pitch in and help,” he said. “We really enjoyed having them here.”

Brevard County’s beaches and waterways are home to a variety of sea turtles, according to the Sea Turtle Preservation Society in Indialantic, Fla. These include the loggerhead, green, leatherback, Kemp’s Ridley, and hawksbill turtles.

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