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50TH ANIMAL RELEASED BY NATIONAL AQUARIUM IN BALTIMORE'S MARINE ANIMAL RESCUE PROGRAM

Baltimore, Md. (Sept. 26, 2003) – The National Aquarium in Baltimore released a juvenile Kemp's ridley sea turtle on September 25, 2003 in the waters off Taylor's Island, MD, near where it was caught in a pound net on July 11, 2003.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources responded - as standard procedure when turtles are caught – and requested the Aquarium's Marine Animal Rescue Program (MARP) care for the animal due to an old wound in its shell, or carapace. Aquarium veterinarians treated the injury, which was probably caused by a boat strike.

During its time at the Aquarium, the turtle gained a healthy eight pounds. Kemp's ridley sea turtles (the most endangered sea turtle species in the world) are found along the mid-Atlantic as juveniles; adults live primarily in the Gulf of Mexico. Fewer than 1,000 nesting females are believed to live today, compared to 42,000 in 1947.

“When a marine animal strands, it has a very slim chance for survival,” said David Schofield, ocean health manager for the Aquarium. “Returning animals to their natural environment is always a thrill; marking the milestone of the 50th animal we have rescued, rehabilitated and released is extraordinary.”

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The turtle was driven to Solomons Island, before being transferred to and released from the Aquarium's boat, the RV Carcharhinus.

MARP is volunteer-based and was developed in 1991. During its 12 years, the program has provided around-the-clock care for many animals, including seals, dolphins, porpoises, other whales and sea turtles.

The National Aquarium in Baltimore's program is part of the North East Stranding Network. The Aquarium's hospital pool is the largest in the region, holding 98,000 gallons. On average, MARP responds to between 30 – 35 strandings each year and has the capacity to care for numerous animals at once.

The National Aquarium in Baltimore, a non-profit organization, is Baltimore's leading attraction, hosting more than 1.6 million visitors per year. The Aquarium's mission is to connect people with aquatic life in order to create a better world for both. Its impact extends well beyond the walls through more than a dozen programs that serve the environment and the community.