

# Helping Turtles

**Last year, more sea turtles than usual washed up on Massachusetts beaches. People stepped in to help.**

It's not unusual to find sea turtles washed up on the beaches of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Last November, though, things got weird. "It started out as a normal year," Bob Prescott of the Massachusetts Audubon Society told TFK, "then it quickly went out of control."

In a "normal year," about 200 turtles get stuck in Cape Cod Bay. But between November and December, the number of sea turtles stranded in Cape Cod climbed to nearly 1,300. Nobody knew why. But one thing was clear: The turtles would need more help than ever.

## Lending a Hand

Most of the turtles that wash up in Cape Cod are endangered Kemp's ridley turtles. They are born on beaches in Mexico and Texas. Then young turtles swim into the Gulf of Mexico. Some get caught in the Gulf Stream, a powerful Atlantic current that pulls them north to Cape Cod.

Stunned by cold water, a turtle's heartbeat slows and the turtle is unable to swim. As a result, it washes up on the beach.

Volunteers rescue the reptiles and take them to the New England Aquarium for medical care. The goal is to get the turtles healthy and then set them free in warmer, southern waters, mostly off the



**This turtle was flown to Florida after being stranded in Massachusetts.**

coast of Florida.

This winter, the aquarium couldn't handle all 733 turtles brought in alive. So about 15 wildlife centers across the country stepped in to receive 561 of the turtles. One official estimates that about 200 turtles have been released into the wild so far.

"This couldn't have been done without everyone's help," Prescott says.

—By Jaime Joyce



**Think** Why were turtles released off the Florida coast? What would you have done with them?

## Power Word

**strand** verb: to leave stuck in one place

**Michael Sprague** of Massachusetts Audubon Society rescues Kemp's ridley turtles from a beach in Cape Cod.

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