

For the Love of a *Loggerhead*

By Andrea Milam

Daisy the loggerhead turtle was on her way to becoming yet another casualty at the hands of man's effect on the environment when her Dec. 30, 2015 encounter with freedivers Shaun Holland and Aaron Bean saved her life.



The divers' initial thrill over getting up close and personal with the gentle oceangoing giant quickly dissolved when they noticed a rasping sound escaping from the turtle's beak. The exhausted loggerhead surrendered herself to the freedivers who managed to get her 130-pound mass up onto their boat and bring her straight to the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum, and Zoo.

It was immediately evident to BAMZ Principal Curator Dr. Ian Walker that the turtle, who was given the moniker of Daisy, was seriously in trouble. Due to Daisy's size, however, she could not be properly assessed by the aquarium's medical equipment. Ian turned to King Edward VII Memorial Hospital, and he was encouraged to bring Daisy there immediately.

"We wrapped her up in a clean, brand new tarp and put her through the hospital's CT scan," says Ian. "Once the radiologist had a chance to view the images, they noticed the foreign body."

That foreign body would turn out to be a longline fishing hook and its rubber leader, which had lodged itself in the section of Daisy's windpipe leading to her left lung. As a result, the left lung was taking air in but couldn't let it out, and the right lung had developed pneumonia.

"She was on death's door," says Ian. "I don't think she would have lasted much longer, although sea turtles can survive a lot."

Ian relied again on the hospital for help in removing the hook. For more than three hours, surgeon Boris Vestweber, anaesthetist Andrew Spence, and surgical nurse Andrew Westhead worked at the hospital under Ian's direction to free Daisy of the manmade burden that had almost taken her life. Their initial attempts to get at the hook through the trachea were unsuccessful, so a cut was made at the base of Daisy's neck, resulting in a successful retrieval. The surgical team, who volunteered their time, relied on Ian's expertise throughout the procedure. He assured the team that the turtle's six

beats per minute heart rate was perfectly normal for a loggerhead and helped them navigate the unfamiliar territory.

"It was obviously completely different anatomy than what they're used to," Ian says.

An hour after the surgery was complete, Daisy took her first breath back at BAMZ's rehab pool. Her sutures have since been removed and she's steadily gained weight thanks to a diet of about four pounds of a variety of fish daily. She was expected to be released as soon as weather conditions were right.

Though Daisy's sensational story captured the hearts of Bermudians and visitors alike, her rescue was all in a day's work for the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum, and Zoo, where the majority of Bermuda's wildlife rehabilitation occurs. Their fully functioning veterinary hospital and quarantine area have in fact seen several turtles afflicted by fishing hooks as well as marine life that's been entangled in twine

or suffered boat strike injuries. Injured land-based animals find their way here as well, including a hawk that suffered a mild stroke after flying into a window and underwent physical therapy at BAMZ.


More than wildlife rehab, BAMZ offers an educational window into the island's biodiversity and history. Visitors to the zoo can immerse themselves in the environments of islands around the world; walk among lemurs sunning themselves in the Madagascar exhibit, or see monkeys scampering through the trees in the Caribbean exhibit. One of the oldest continually running aquariums, the Bermuda Aquarium was founded in 1926. Today, it still remains a vital institution on the island.

"It's one of the best places in Bermuda to learn about the island you're visiting in terms of natural history," says Ian. "I encourage people to come here early in their trip so they can go out and have some knowledge about the wildlife they're seeing during their stay. Bermuda is an absolutely beautiful country, and it's good to know something about it."

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 A lemur is sitting on a stone path in the foreground. In the background, two women are standing and looking towards the camera. The setting appears to be an outdoor exhibit area with rocks and greenery.


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