

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 11, 2024

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Brevard Zoo Releasing Sea Turtle After Plastic Pollution Rehabilitation

MELBOURNE, Fla., January 11, 2024 — Brevard Zoo will be releasing a juvenile green sea turtle Horchata back to the ocean after a 4-month recovery during which this patient passed multiple pieces of plastic. Horchata will be released at 4 p.m. on Tuesday, January 16.

This release will be open to the public and take place rain or shine. Horchata will be in the water at 4 p.m., so the public is advised to arrive before this time.

This sea turtle will be released on the beach in between Canova Beach Park, 3299 N. Highway A1A in Indialantic and Irene H. Canova Park, 2285 Florida A1A in Indian Harbour Beach. The public is welcome to use either park's parking lot – just look for our Healing Center volunteers for the release site on the beach.

The young green sea turtle was found on a reef in Satellite Beach by East Coast Biologists during a research trip. Horchata was discovered with a recreational fishing hook deeply embedded in their flipper. The Zoo's veterinary team was able to surgically remove the hook and treat the turtle using [negative-pressure wound therapy](#). However, when it came to Horchata's healing process, there were more than external injuries to consider.

The day after Horchata's arrival, there was a significant amount of plastic showing up in their stool. Our Healing Center team was quick to remove any plastic in the tank to ensure Horchata wouldn't eat it again. A few days later, the turtle passed even more plastic pieces, amounting to quite the collection. An ultrasound was used to evaluate Horchata's lower gastrointestinal (GI) tract to ensure they didn't suffer any complications. Luckily, the plastic didn't cause any untreatable issues in Horchata. However, that's unfortunately not the case for many sea turtles.

All seven species of sea turtles are specialized eaters, meaning they stick to eating the same foods. Some sea turtles will mistake floating plastic bags for similarly translucent jellyfish. Younger sea turtles -- like Horchata -- will often ingest the plastic rubbish that has become entangled in their natural food source of seagrass or algae. The consumption of plastic can quickly become a life-threatening emergency. The sharp edge of hard plastics may cause damage to the GI track resulting in bleeding. Softer plastics, like shopping bags,

can create a blockage in the intestines. Serious injuries or death can occur after this tragic case of mistaken identity. In addition, these plastics take up space in the turtles' stomach making them feel full, robbing their bodies of vital nutrition.

Our veterinary staff is occasionally able to identify the source of the plastic that winds up in their turtle patients, including a case where one boat's litter was likely thrown overboard. Unfortunately, while careless acts can often be the cause for sea turtle distress, well-intentioned individuals can also add plastic pollution to our waterways.

There are several steps the public can take to start ensuring that your waste isn't wreaking havoc on fragile ecosystems. For instance, even if you throw away your garbage into designated containers at beaches and riverside parks, wind and animals can still remove the litter that later gets blown into the water. A better way to handle trash is to simply pack up what you've brought out. By taking your trash with you and disposing of it at home, you are preventing your garbage from mistakenly winding up as pollution.

Shanon Gann, the Sea Turtle Healing Center manager, also adds other ways you can help combat this problem. "Make the conscious decision to act in your life to refuse single-use plastic. Become active in the community by donating your time or money to Keep Brevard Beautiful or other organizations that routinely clean up garbage from our shorelines and waterways." With these simple steps, we can help one sea turtle at a time avoid a potentially fatal error.

All media personnel are asked to RSVP to Communications Manager Lauren Delgado prior to the event and check in with the Zoo's communications team upon arrival. Flippers will be in the water at 4 p.m.; media personnel are advised to arrive early.

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Brevard Zoo is home to more than 900 animals representing 195 species from all over the world. As a not-for-profit organization, it is a leader in the fields of animal wellness, education and conservation. More information is available at www.brevardzoo.org.