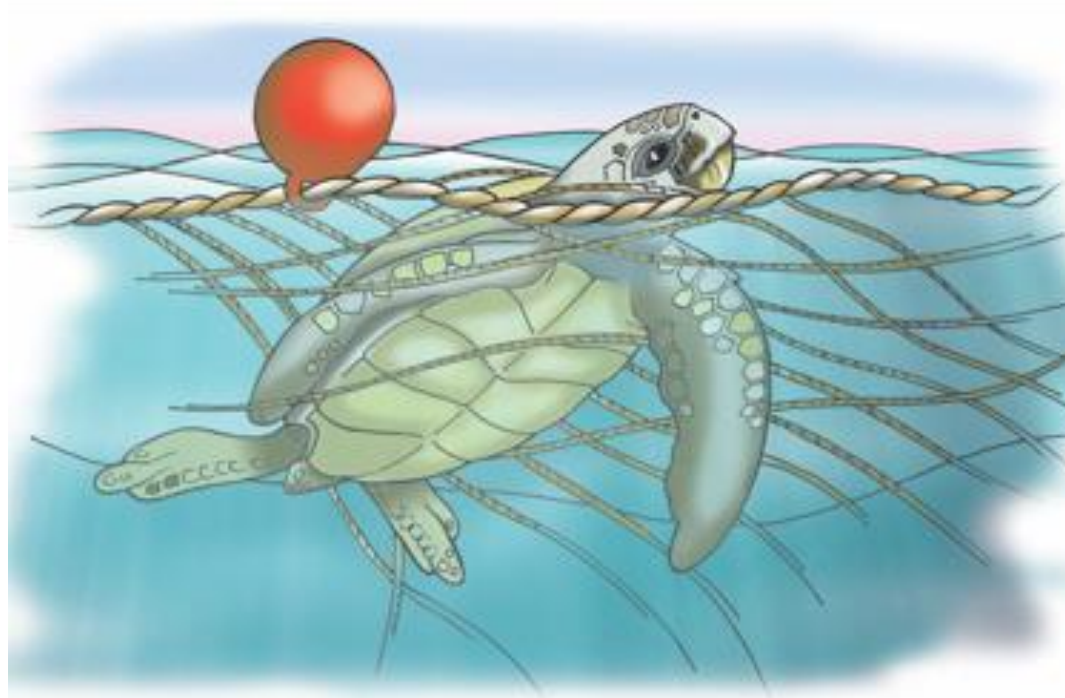


Picture Story: Turtle Tours

Tracking the journey of an ocean ambassador

Picture 1



Not so long ago there lived a Loggerhead turtle in the sea off the coast of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. She spent her days foraging for molluscs on the inshore reefs and floating lazily in the sun-kissed, warm water. At night she slept on the reef floor, or floating on the surface if the sea was calm. One day, she was swept away from her home reef during the storm. She lifted her head above the water to get her bearings but could not see land. She was swimming but something was holding her back. She was trapped. The turtle continued to swim but finally gave up. Luckily, she had been swimming near the surface of the sea so even though she was trapped she could get her head out of the water to breathe.

Picture 2



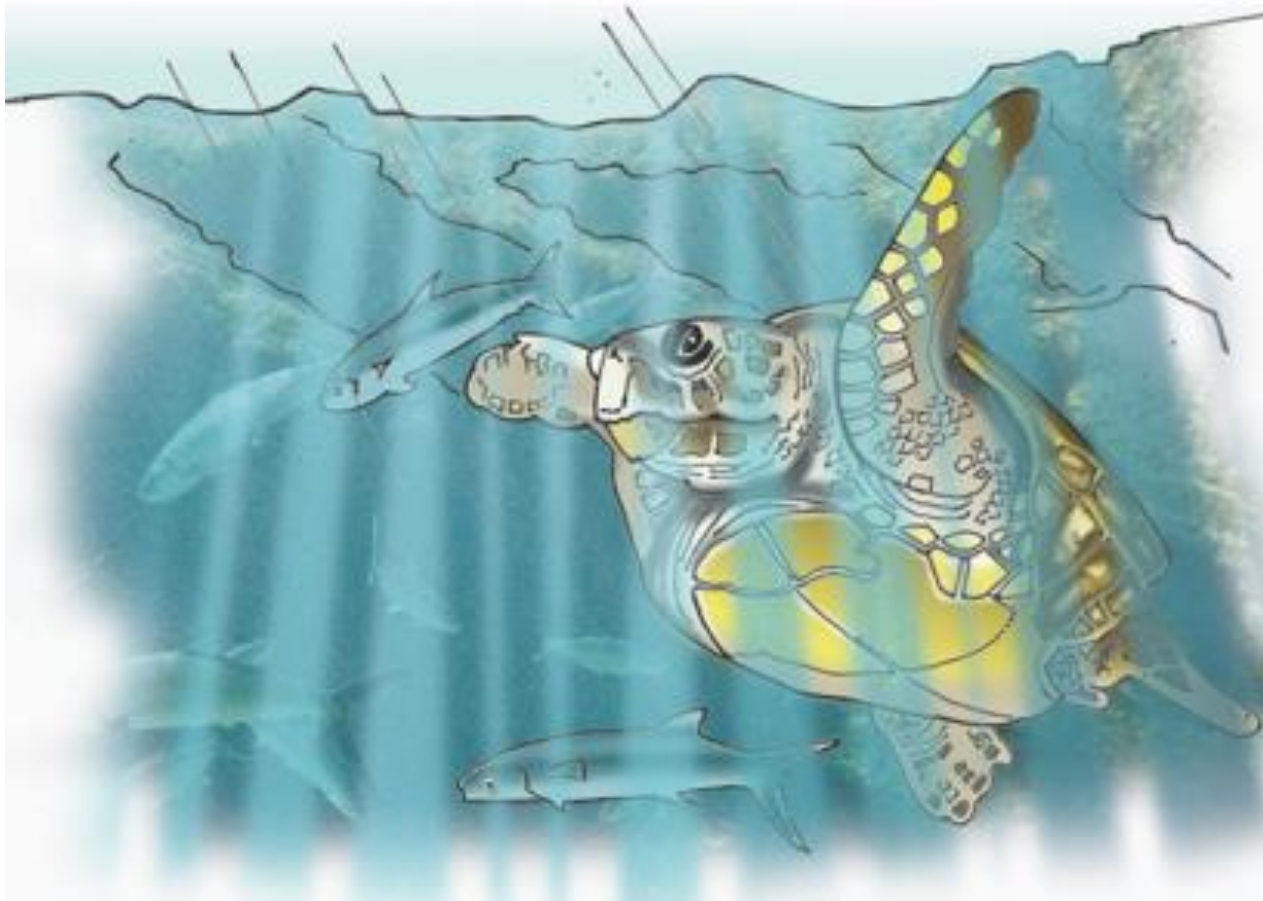
Hours later, she heard a frightening noise. Bongani and Shipo who had been fishing behind the breakers saw something caught in a shark net. Bongani grabbed the net found her entangled in the ropes. They untangled the rope and saved the exhausted turtle.

Picture 3



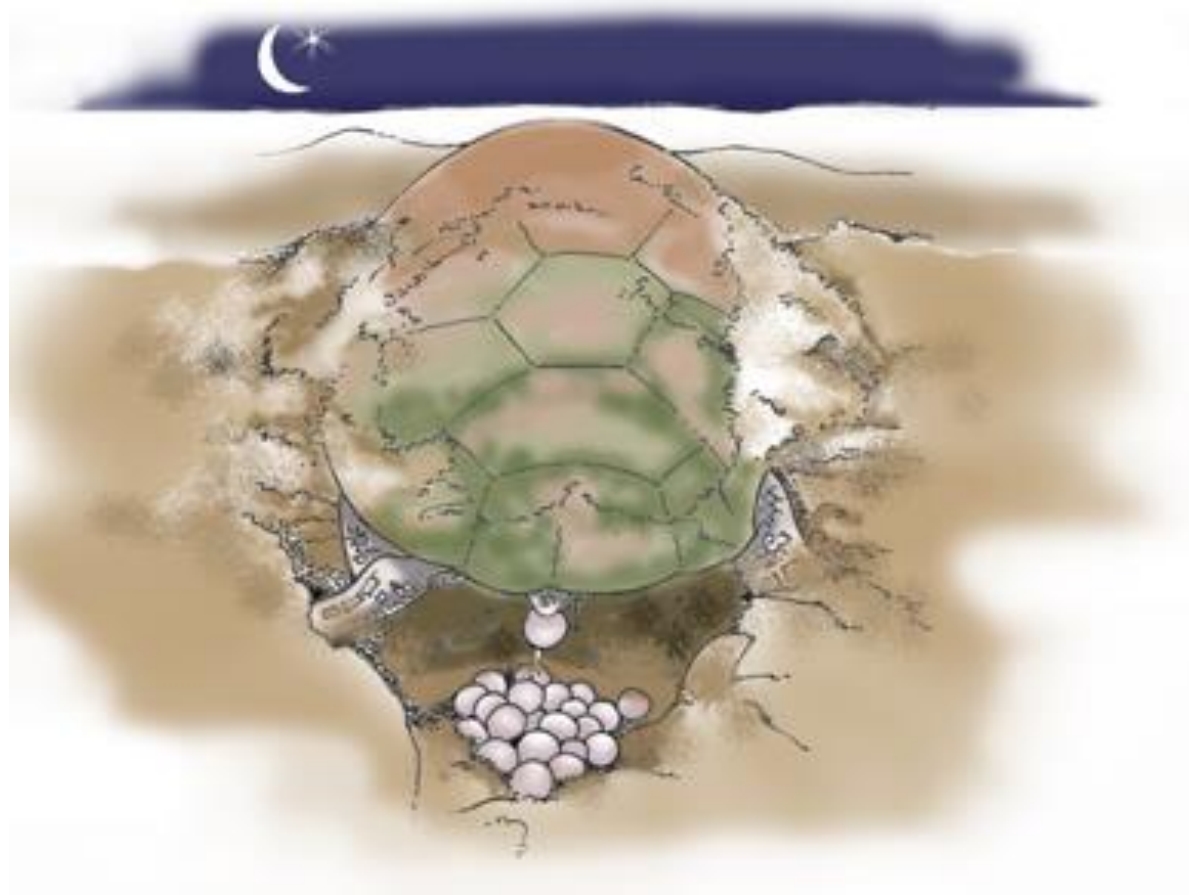
Sipho and Bongani immediately phoned the Durban Aquarium. Simon, a curator came to collect the turtle. They named her Herbie. Herbie adapted to her foster home quickly and recovered from her ordeal.

Picture 4



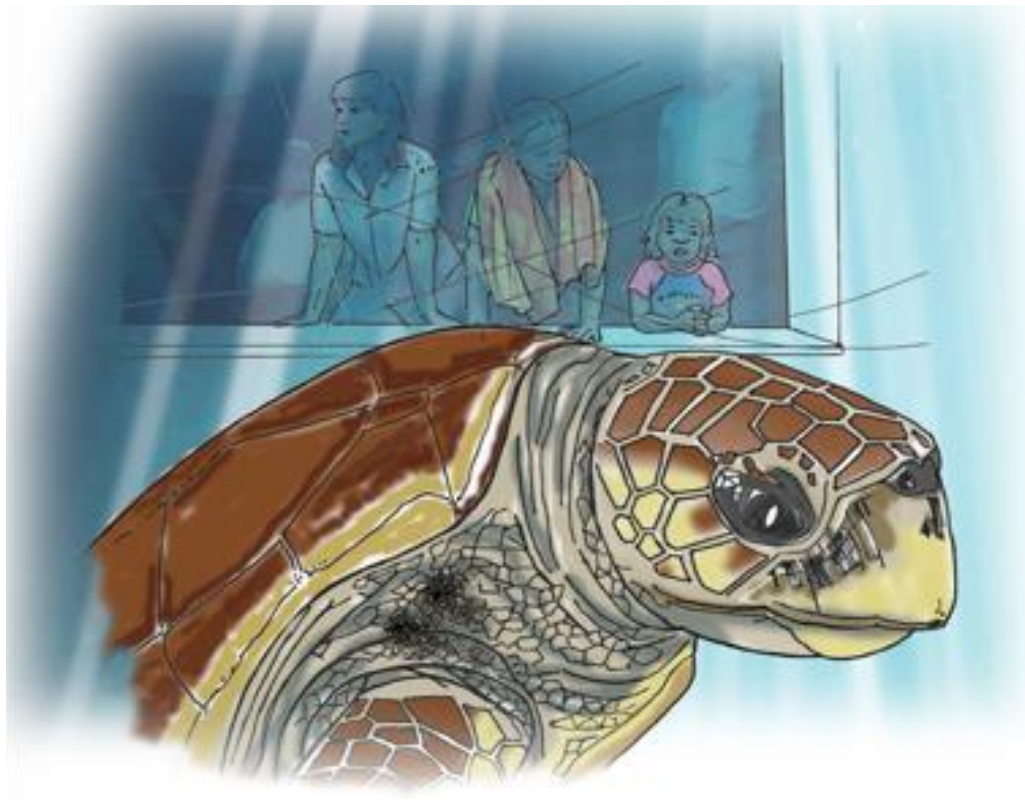
Some years later Herbie moved with the aquarium to her new home at uShaka Sea World, her carers catering to her every need. Over time, she was taught to go to the same spot every day to get food, medicine and to be checked for any parasites or diseases. Herbie was 8 years old when she was rescued from the net. She has been the star attraction at the aquarium for 16 years. Now, she is 25 and her instincts have told her that it's time to nest and lay eggs. She knows that the beach where she hatched is far away and she hasn't come across a mate since she was brought to the aquarium.

Picture 5



One night when the staff and visitors had all gone home, Herbie swam to the beach where her carers come to the water to feed her. She lumbered across the sand; it's the right texture and she carefully digs an egg cavity with her back flippers. When the nest is deep enough, Herbie lays 80 soft shelled, round eggs.

Picture 6



On arriving at the sandy beach at the Turtle Lagoon, Simon notices sand thrown all over the place. What a mess! Was there a group of unruly children using the beach as a sand pit yesterday? How did they get in? He was a little irritated. No! What's that?

Simon knows what turtle tracks look like as he helped to monitor turtles nesting many years ago.

Excitedly he phones one of his colleagues on the radio:

"Malini! Come in. Can you come to Turtle Lagoon? Out".

Malini was so excited to see that Herbie had laid eggs.

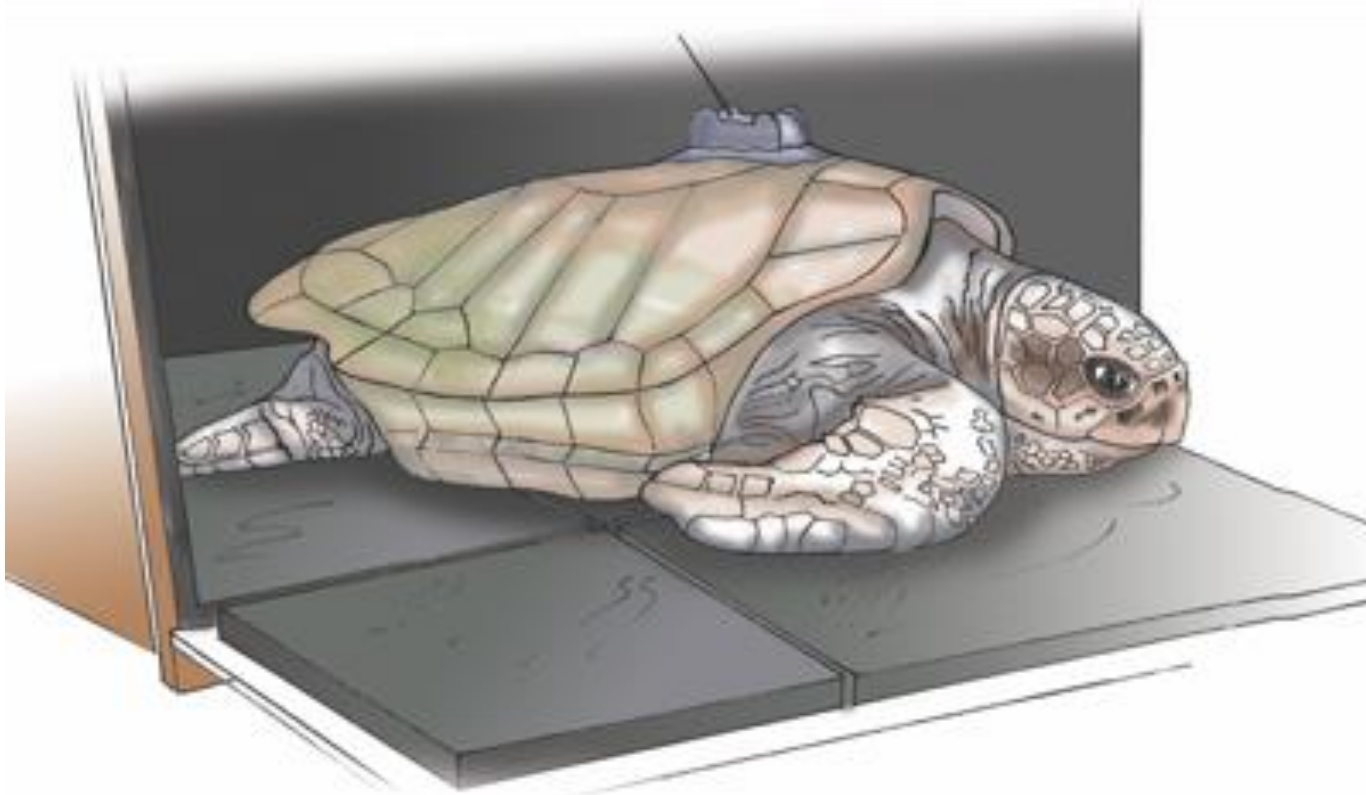
This is good news - she is now a mature loggerhead turtle and it's time to think about her release back into the ocean.

Picture 7



Herbie has many friends who come to see her and take photos of their favourite turtle through the aquarium window. Everyone who loves Herbie knows the best thing for her would be to take her back home. Much has been learnt about how to look after turtles in captivity from Herbie. The aquarium has rehabilitated and released at least 200 turtles over the years.

Picture 8



Rehabilitation and release are one of their priorities, especially for endangered animals. One morning, Herbie was suddenly she was lifted out of the water and placed in a rubber-lined box. She felt cramped, frightened like when she was caught in the net all those years ago. She could breathe but could not escape. The decision was made to release Herbie in the Maputaland Marine Protected Area. A satellite tracking device was attached to Herbie's shell, to be able to check up on her progress. The next 6 hours were noisy, bumpy and very unfamiliar for Herbie. But she trusted these beings, they were kind and had become her family.

Picture 9



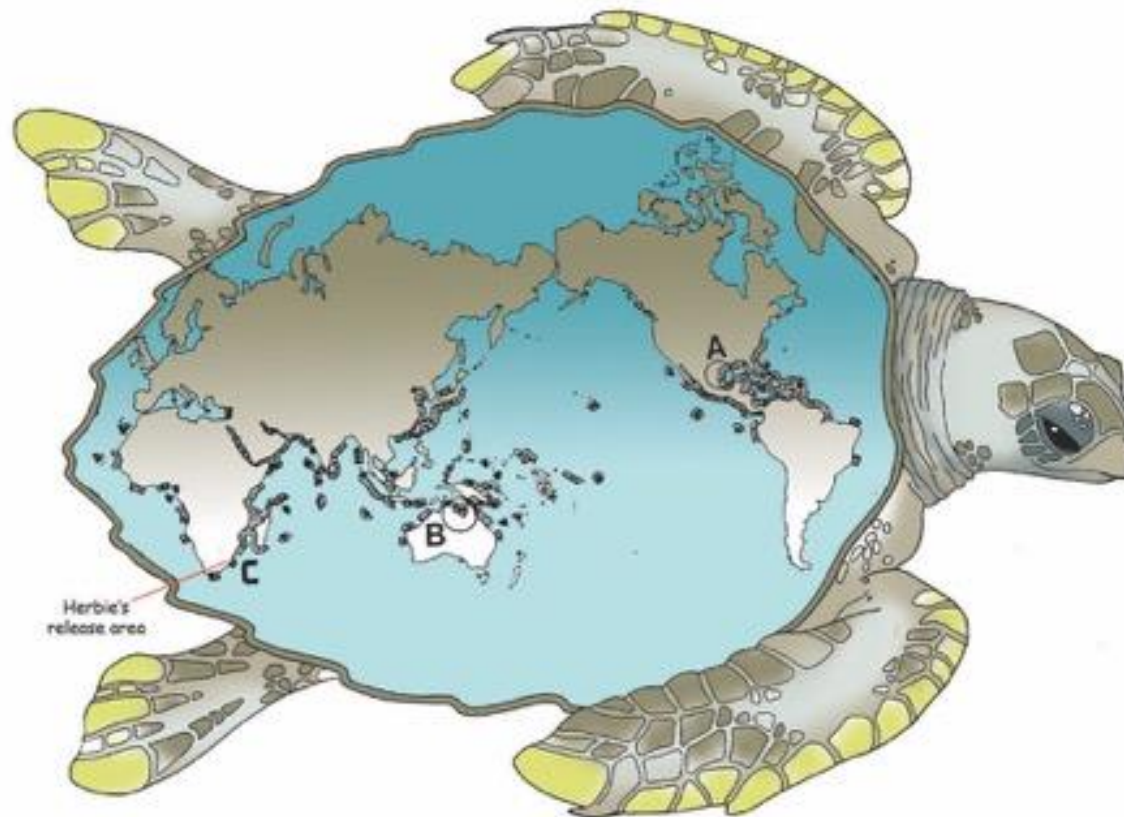
Suddenly the bumping stopped, the box she was in was lifted and put down on the beach. She knew where she was, she wanted to get into that vast watery wilderness... to go home. Her instincts kicked in, Herbie lumbered out of the box and onto the beach heading straight for the water. She did not even look back to say goodbye.

Picture 10



Herbie's satellite tracking device stopped working on the 12th April 2019, she was released in January. We do not know what happened to her satellite tracking device, but a paddle skier did see her south of her last transmission off Kingsburg Beach. She is a truly free turtle now, we hope she will one day be seen nesting on our beaches, identified by the tag in her fin.

Picture 11



How do turtles find their way back home?

Sea turtles' nest in a wide, warm belt around the world. They return to nest on the same beaches where they themselves hatched, and each species of sea turtle has a special place in the world where they nest. For some, only one particular place will do. Kemp's Ridley nests only on one beach on the north-east coast of Mexico (A). The flatback lays its eggs only on the coast of northern Australia (B). Some loggerhead turtles migrate over 3 500 km to nest on the northern Zululand beaches of South Africa (C). They migrate as far as the southern tip of Africa or north to Somalia and the Seychelles. It is a wonder that sea turtles seem to remember where they were born and that they can find these places again.

Questions for classroom discussions

Teachers can ask these questions to students after reading the story, to enable a discussion in the classroom.

1. What did you learn from this story?
2. What do you think are some of the threats faced by sea turtles?
3. What are some of the other things that you have read or heard about sea turtles?
4. Do we think conserving turtles are important? If yes, why?
5. What are some of steps we can take to conserve turtles?
6. Have you been a part of turtle walks or beach clean ups? If yes, share your experiences. If no, will you take part in such conservation actions going forward?
7. What are some steps you will take in order to conserve turtles?