

Endangered sea turtle

BY JUDIE MARKS

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The Monterey Bay Aquarium's first green sea turtle died Friday after nearly drowning in the million-gallon tank in the Outer Bay exhibit.

The turtle, believed to be about 30 years old, apparently got wedged and trapped in a drainage trough about 11 p.m. Tuesday.

It was unable to breathe for about 10 hours.

Staff members gave the 250-pound turtle cardiopulmonary resuscitation for about 90

'It . . . served as an

minutes after finding it Wednesday morning on the bottom of the tank.

"When we noticed only one turtle in the exhibit during morning rounds, we immediately sent in divers to find and extract the other animal," said Joe Choromanski, the aquarium's curator of husbandry opera-

dies at aquarium

mbassador for its species.'

— Joe Choromanski, Monterey Bay Aquarium

tions.

"When we brought him to the surface, he appeared to be dead, but staff began immediate and heroic resuscitation efforts," Choromanski said.

The efforts to revive the turtle included manipulating its four flippers to force air in

and out of his lungs, administering oxygen and injecting drugs to stimulate his heart and clear fluid from his lungs and stomach.

The turtle then began breathing on its own in the aquarium's quarantine area, but died Friday.

Choromanski said he had been hopeful the turtle would survive because "sea turtles are incredibly hardy animals. In the wild, they've been known to spend several days buried in the mud on the sea floor without surfacing to breathe.

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Herald file

THE GREEN SEA TURTLE swims in the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Outer Bay exhibit in February 1996.

TURTLE

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"We thought this animal might make it. Sadly, he did not survive."

He said green sea turtles are curious and are known to take shelter in underwater caves. The turtle may have thought the drainage trough led to a cave, but then it was unable to get back out of the narrow trough.

A time-lapse video recorded in the exhibit showed the sea turtle got wedged after he and

the aquarium's larger, 350-pound green sea turtle dislodged a temporary grate that had been installed during repair work on the bottom of the tank. The second turtle was not injured.

Repair work was immediately suspended and construction procedures were changed to ensure that future temporary grates will be so heavily weighted that they cannot be moved by a sea turtle.

Green sea turtles, which are hunted for their meat and tracked on beaches for their eggs, are an endangered species.

The one that died had been on long-term loan since 1996 from the Aquarium for Wildlife Conservation in New York. Choromanski said he had notified the curator of the New York aquarium of the animal's death.

Choromanski said the turtle had been in captivity since the

late 1960s, but its exact age was not known. The origin of the animal had not been known, he said, but mitochondrial DNA tests taken since its arrival here showed that it was from the Caribbean.

"It was an animal that served as an ambassador for its species," he said. "It's always unfortunate when you lose one of those ambassadors because they're not easily replaceable."