



Eddy Wylie / THE BATTALION

Animals At A&M

Endangered sea turtles find safe haven at A&M

Amber Clark
THE BATTALION

College Station is far from the ocean, but for four endangered Kemp's Ridley sea turtles, A&M is the best place to call home.

Dr. Dave Owens, a marine biology professor at A&M, is part of an international collaboration between Mexico and the United States. The two countries are attempting to protect the endangered turtles, which are indigenous to the Gulf of Mexico.

For centuries, several species of sea turtles have been hunted for their meat, shells and eggs. The meat and shells have high black-market values, and some people believe the eggs contain an aphrodisiac. The turtles, especially the Kemp's Ridelys, have nearly been driven to extinction.

Recently, the U.S. and Mexican governments have begun major conservation efforts. The governments have established land preserves for the endangered species, although poaching remains a serious concern. When an injured turtle is found, it can be placed in a rehabilitation program, where biologists such as Owens can try to rescue the reptile.

A&M has provided rehabilitation services for several sea turtles that have been returned to their ocean home.

Owens received this particular group of Kemp's Ridelys several years ago. Initially, the four turtles arrived at A&M for rehabilitation and eventual return to the ocean. Since each turtle has a slight deformation that inhibits its release into the wild, Owens keeps the turtles for observational and educational purposes.

"People are really interested because the turtles are endangered and threatened," Owens said. "They often don't realize that Texas is a sea turtle habitat."

Although the Texas Gulf Coast is not a turtle nesting area, Owens said the turtles often migrate to Texas to feed on the abundance of

crabs, turtle grass and algae. Owens said the turtles return to Latin American shores to lay their eggs, so turtle sightings on Texas shores are rare occurrences.

"We have a lot of food resources here," Owens said. "The turtles eat here then migrate somewhere else at adulthood. People don't see the turtles in Texas waters, so they assume they can't be found here."

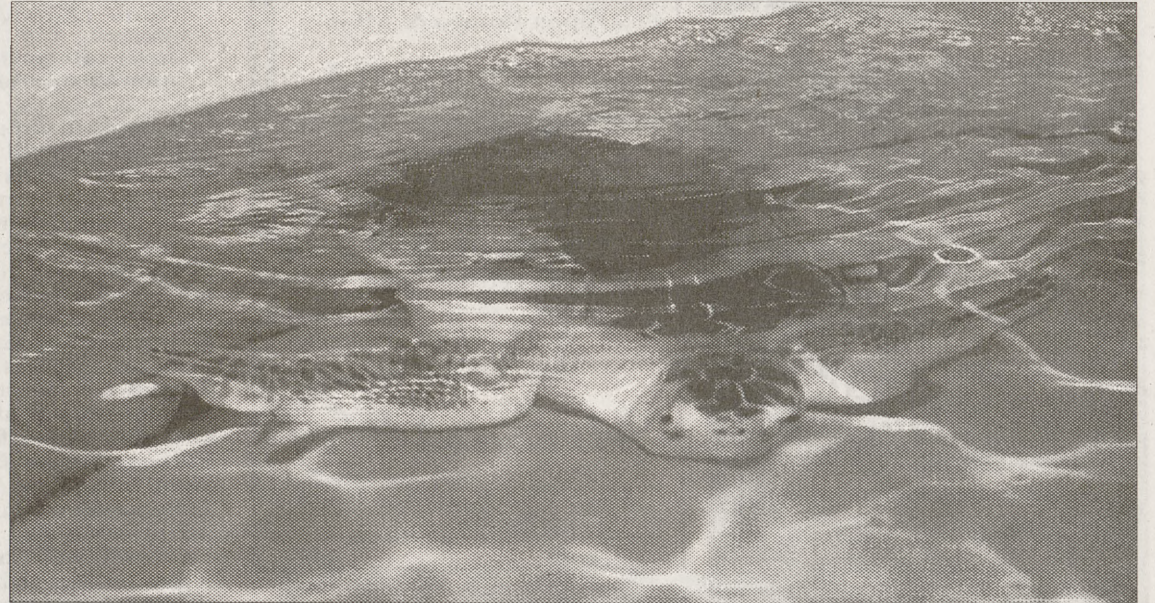
Owens also said people aren't always aware of the threats sea turtles must face. At one time, there were five turtle canneries in Texas. Owens said this was a small industry often overlooked by Texas residents.

Since the turtles share their ocean habitat with shrimp, Owens said the reptiles often get trapped in trawls, devices used by commercial fishermen to catch shrimp. Owens said this has created a controversy over the safety of the turtles, who are frequently injured and die when snagged in the trawls. Fishermen insist on using the trawls to support their income, but conservationists seek to preserve the sea turtles.

Owens said Texas is lacking in its attempts to protect the species.

"The state is a little behind in terms of sea turtle conservation," Owens said. "But I think Texas is now starting to understand the importance of preserving the turtles. As far as I'm concerned, we're catching up."

Several A&M graduate students are also working on the program with Owens, although most of them are working in other countries. Owens has undergraduate students who are currently assisting him with local educational programs regarding the pro-



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The four A&M sea turtles are part of a rehabilitation program.

tection of marine animals.

Schools in the Bryan-College Station area are encouraged to bring children to the A&M campus to visit the turtles.

"We get phone calls all the time," Owens said. "Kids love to come see the turtles, fish and reefs."

Horse course provides unique equine experience

Nikki Hopkins
THE BATTALION

Maria is having a baby.

She paces back and forth across the floor, waiting for the right to fall.

Finally, with a great sigh, she lays down on her side as the labor pains rattle through her body.

Maria gives birth to an auburn-colored youngster who lays quietly for a while, then stands up on four wobbly legs to stumble to her mother.

Maria's full name is Maria Copy and she is one of the pregnant horses assigned to Texas A&M students during the spring for Animal Science 420, Equine Production and Management.

This course is designed to instruct

students in the reproductive systems of the horse in hands-on experience.

Students are assigned a pregnant mare at the beginning of the spring semester and it is their job to care for and monitor the horse throughout her pregnancy until she foals, or gives birth.

Experience is not necessary for the class, and the students do not have to be veterinary students. But the hours are long and erratic and students have to be prepared to spend a few nights in a dusty barn.

Joe Ables, senior biomedical science and animal science major, said his mare had her baby over spring break when he took the course last year, so he missed the foaling.

Ables said he wanted to see at least one birth, so he stayed up at the barn

eight nights in hopes of watching another mare.

"A mare would foal right before I got there," Ables said, "and the minute I left, another one would go."

"I got to see everything before and after three foalings," he said. "So when I finally got to see one, I was really experienced."

Heather Lowrey-Koenning and her partner Brenda Radde hold the ANSC 420 record for the longest time spent in the barn.

Lowrey-Koenning, senior animal science major, spent 21 nights in the Equine Center barn waiting for her mare, My Darlin Enterprise, to have her foal.

"It's exciting watching your mare foal out," she said. "A lot of people gripe about how long they have to spend in the barn but I tell them, 'Hey, look at how long I was here and I'm not complaining.'"

Lowrey-Koenning said her mare was a maiden, a horse who has never had a foal before, and was two weeks overdue.

"At first we stayed up all night and checked her every hour or so," she said. "We brought pillows, sleeping bags, an alarm clock and we ordered out a lot."

My Darlin Enterprise had her foal at 11:20 pm on March 8, Lowrey-Koenning said.

"I was glad," she said. "I'm married and so is my partner, but you wait so long and somehow it's worth it when it's all over."

Charlie Apter, teaching assistant for the course, said some students have an easier time than others.

"Some people luck out," Apter said. "They look at their mare, put her in the barn, and she foals the next day."

Apter, who is on call in case of problems during the births, said he promised to get Lowrey-Koenning and Radde some sort of trophy for their record-breaking stay in the barn.

"It's definitely time-consuming," Apter said. "Two nights ago I got three phone calls between one and five in the morning."

"This year one of the mares, Mary McDock, got a salmonella infection and died, leaving an orphan foal," he said.

Apter said he tried to get another mare to adopt the 32-day-old foal but she wouldn't accept it.

"The other mare produces a massive amount of milk," he said. "We put her



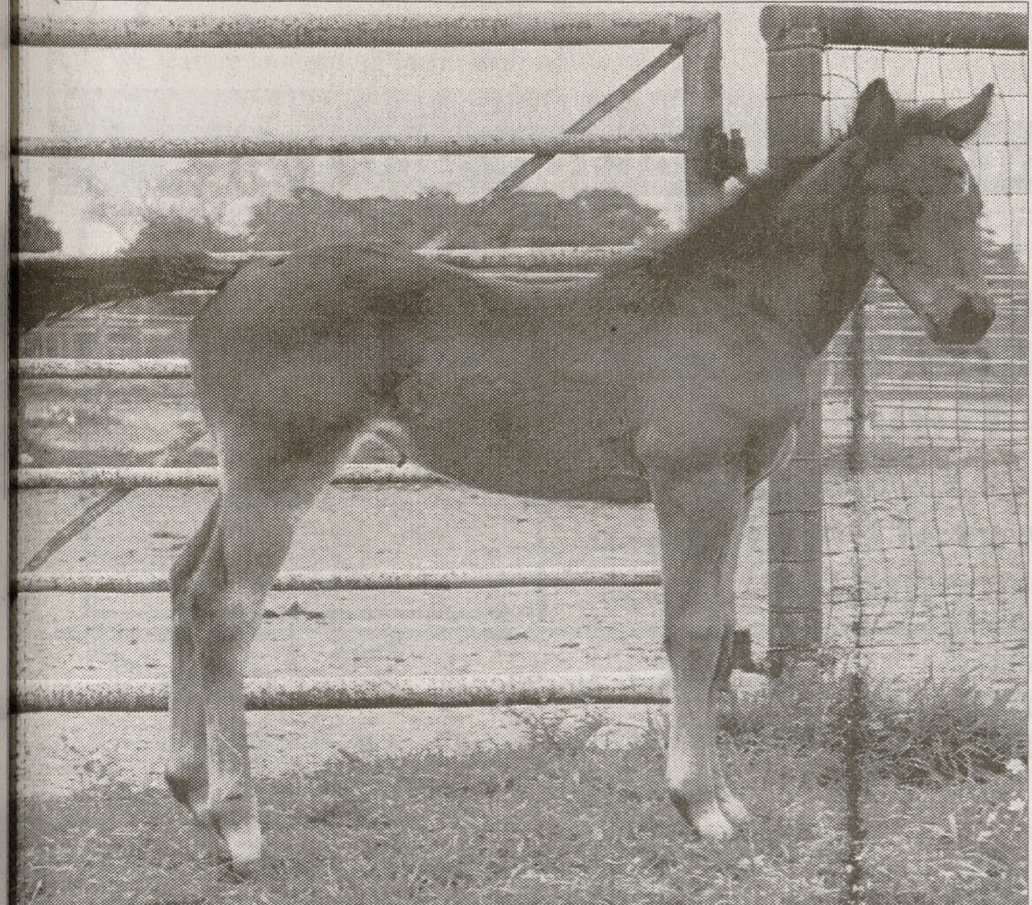
Roger Hsieh / THE BATTALION

This foal is only part of a program designed to give students hands-on experience with horse foaling.

in stocks (a restraining device) and let the foal nurse, but the mare was not too happy about it."

Apter said the foal is being fed with buckets of a milk substitute and is doing fine.

"I think this class is an opportunity not many students get to have," he said. "Some look at it as just another class but I don't think so. Every time I see a mare foal, I see a life-threatening, life-giving event."



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Orphan foal being taken care of at the Equine center.