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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Endangered sea turtle undergoes third scan at Decatur Morgan Hospital**

DECATUR, AL – Kale, the endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtle in the care of Cook Museum of Natural Science, underwent his third computed tomography (CT) scan at Decatur Morgan Hospital on Tuesday, May 28.

This collaboration helped give care to one of Alabama's most endangered species. The CT scan is the best diagnostic tool to assess the progress of ongoing osteomyelitis, a bony infection, in Kale's carapace (top part of his shell).

The initial scan, taken in July 2023, gave Cook Museum's veterinarian, Dr. Christian Keller, and Animal Care staff a baseline of Kale's condition. The second and third scan have provided crucial insights into Kale's status, enabling the team to tailor his treatment accordingly.

Kale has been at his forever home with the Cook Museum since 2020, but came off display in January 2022 to address health concerns and was moved to the Museum's off-site facility.

Since that time, the Animal Care staff and the Museum's veterinarian team have spent 1,200+ man-hours helping Kale recover from his infection.

The team has been diligently monitoring Kale's condition daily, administering medications and treatments to combat his osteomyelitis.

DOC Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine donated surgical supplies that have played a pivotal role in Kale's treatment. These tools allowed Cook Museum staff to successfully remove portions of his carapace, pack those areas with antimicrobial material, and protect them with bone cement to help Kale fight this infection.

These CT scans and treatments are just some of the many steps in his hopeful return to the Oceans Tank at the Museum.

“Reptiles are well known for being able to heal incredible injuries, but in general it takes them a longer time than warm-blooded animals,” according to Keller. “Their temperatures are cooler, and they have slower metabolism, so it’s been a long time since anyone has been able to see Kale in the Exhibit. This CT scan will provide us with a quantitative measure of the healing that still needs to occur.”

Kemp’s ridley sea turtles have been protected under the Endangered Species Act since 1970, and they are currently listed as “critically endangered” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Kale is non-releasable, and he provides opportunities for public education and acts as an ambassador for his species, helping foster a connection between Museum visitors and nature. His care and conservation provide valuable scientific data and a better understanding of the species and its challenges.

The Cook Museum of Natural Science has a fund available for those interested in donating to support his recovery. If you would like to contribute to Kale’s care or learn more about his story, you can visit [cookmuseum.org/kale](https://cookmuseum.org/kale).

## **Kale’s Story**

Kale came to the Museum from the Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center, a facility that rescues and rehabilitates sea turtles and other marine animals so they can be released back into the wild.

Kale, while still a juvenile, was hooked by a recreational fishman off a pier on Chesapeake Bay in Virginia in 2019. Due to the size of the hook, an endoscopic procedure could not remove the hook. Therefore, several invasive surgeries were required.

His wound did not fully heal and created scar tissue and a fistula, a hollow space where food and debris can get trapped and cause infections. Due to the fistula, Kale needs medical attention from time to time, making him a non-releasable sea turtle.

## **More About the Cook Museum of Natural Science**

The Cook Museum of Natural Science is a state-of-the-art natural science museum in downtown Decatur, Alabama. It provides a hands-on experience where kids can explore, interact with, and learn about nature.

They offer immersive Exhibits, STEAM-based education classes & camps, live animal presentations, educational programming, field trips, Fun Days, and much more! The Museum’s mission is to engage, excite, and educate visitors about the natural created world around them.

Cook Museum was recognized by USA Today as the Best New Museum in 2021, and has been featured in Smithsonian Magazine, Southern Living, Birmingham Parent, and Rocket City Mom’s Family Favorites since opening in 2019.

## **Fifth Year Anniversary Celebration**

June 2024 will mark the Fifth Anniversary of the Cook Museum in its current location, and they are hosting monthly social media giveaways, new experiences, and fun events throughout the year to celebrate.

Their Fifth Year Anniversary Celebration will be on June 8 & 9 with door prizes, live animals, an outdoor inflatable, and Member-Only Double Discounts. Local partners such as Green Pea Press, Anniston Museums & Garden, Huntsville Botanical Garden, North Alabama Agriplex, and more will offer hands-on activities from 10 am to 2 pm on Saturday. The new Cook Museum Mining Co. will be open both days so visitors can purchase mining bags to mine for their own gemstones (weather dependent).

Rocks Rock Fun Day and Member Appreciation Day will be on Saturday, July 13 from 10 am to 2 pm with plenty more hands-on geology fun!