

FAST FORWARD: GEORGIA SEA TURTLE CENTER

VO: Welcome to another episode of Fast Forward. Today we're checking out some Georgia's coolest jobs, and rescuing sea turtles! Okay, actually these folks are doing the heavy lifting—literally.

We're visiting the Georgia Sea Turtle Center on Jekyll Island, part of Georgia's golden isles. And a pretty great place to spend a couple of days, or even a career if you're lucky. And it's also the perfect ecosystem for sea turtles. What's an ecosystem you ask? Well, there's no better way to explain it than with a puppet show:

SHARK: Mmmm, sea turtle! I see a lunch turtle!

SEA TURTLE: No! No need to eat me. If you were to eat me you'd destroy the delicate balance of our ecosystem.

SHARK: I'm gonna eat you for lunch.

SEA TURTLE: I pity the fool that eats a sea turtle.

VO: Okay, there probably is a better way to explain it. Let's get it from an expert instead.

BEN: An ecosystem refers to all the elements of a particular environment. It includes the plants, animals, fungi, and bacteria. Things we can see and can't see – so those living elements in addition to the physical elements.

VO: Those physical elements are things like sunlight, soil and water, which basically means Jekyll Island is paradise for sea turtles. So let's find out a little more about this place.

STEVEN: The Georgia Sea Turtle Center is an awesome place for people to come and learn about sea turtles, as well as showcases the essence of conservation. We do rehab, rescue, and research.

CHARLOTTE: The Georgia Sea Turtle Center is a fantastic place for turtles to be rehabilitated and hopefully, eventually released. They get the best healthcare I've seen for sea turtles out there. It's also an incredible education facility

KIDS: Turtle's rule!

DR. NORTON: The short version is that we're using sea turtles as a flagship species to create awareness for the entire marine ecosystem.

VO: And these folks really walk the walk...or is that swim the swim. On a typical day, you'll find a patient like Sendac here, getting a little help from his friends.

STEVEN: Today was Sendac, a sub adult loggerhead sea turtle's, weekly exam.

DR. NORTON: Sendac is probably 15-18 years old.

STEVEN: We call her a debilitated loggerhead.

DR. NORTON: Which means that the turtle is in a starvation type of situation. There can be a lot of causes to that.

STEVEN: So today she came out and we scraped on her shell to remove all of the scab material and make way for new healing.

DR. NORTON: We put bone cement with antibiotics on the wounds.

STEVEN: While she was out we also collected blood, got a weight on our animal so that we can monitor her health and she's steadily improving.

VO: By the way, one of the things they use on some injured sea turtles is honey. Which makes this a great time for another teachable moment.

KRISTIN: While we might like to snack on honey sometimes, this honey is reserved for our turtle patients. Honey is very acidic and has a very low PH, which means nothing is going to grow in honey. It is germ free, and that's why it stays so fresh in your kitchen cabinets for so long. It's a natural anti-fungal, anti-microbial, and anti-bacterial substance. So we can use it to treat some of our sea turtle patients who might have some deep wounds or cuts. We can put honey on them and then seal it off with honeycomb, and that makes it waterproof. So they can't eat it on their bodies while they rehabilitate here at the center.

VO: And I hear it's also good in tea.

Okay. So...how do you get into the sea turtle business?

CHARLOTTE: I've always been interested in medicine. However, being in a human hospital wasn't favorite place...I didn't really like treating sick humans, but I'd always loved animals. I considered being a vet and a marine biologist, but at the marine mammal center I fell in love with ability to practice medicine to treat so many different species.

STEVEN: I wanted to work with the cool animals—exotic's, wildlife, and be in conservation medicine, so reptiles in particular. I went to Disney's animal kingdom and worked as an intern with a team there. I came here and I get to work with sea turtles and gators, snakes, so it's pretty diverse.

VO: Do you have to be a veterinary surgeon to work at a place like this?

DR. NORTON: Within The Sea Turtle Center, we have educators, researchers, people taking care of the turtles, people in our gift shop that still have to be knowledgeable about what's going on with the turtles. There are so many things you can do within veterinary medicine.

STEVEN: If you want to work with animals you could be a park ranger, an educator, or you could work with a variety of rehab facilities working with wild animals...the possibilities are endless.

VO: I like that—endless possibilities working with wild animals...

BEN: We like to keep the wildlife wild on Jekyll Island.

VO: Yeah, speaking of that is any of this stuff dangerous?

STEVEN: I once got bit by a nearly dead sea turtle.

VO: That's what I'm talking about! You were saying?

STEVEN: It was pretty painful and I didn't have sensation in the tip of my finger for about 3 months. They have a very strong beak and they bite and typically will let go, but the pressure per square inch of their bite is similar to that of an alligator.

VO: Okay, if occasionally getting bitten by a sea turtle is the down side of working here, what's the best part?

DR. NORTON: We're doing this for a reason. We're doing this to release these animals. So it's very rewarding to ultimately see these animals recover and be able to get them back in the wild

JOSEPH: This is as simple as it gets, a really cool job. I get to spend days outside working with wildlife, interacting with nature. Some people just aren't meant to be in an office all the time and that's one of the best parts of this job for me.

STEVEN: I come to work and it's something different every day, and to know that I'm really making a difference in the world especially for these animals, it's very rewarding. We're doing this for those animals and getting them back in the wild is our mission. Even the worst days here are pretty amazing and one of the best jobs you could have.

VO: Which pretty much gets us back to where we started. But don't worry; we'll have more cool Georgia jobs to show you on the next episode of Fast Forward!