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Chicago Daily Tribune

ON JULY 12 ...

In 100 B.C., Roman dictator Julius Caesar was born.

In 1690 Protestant forces led by William of Orange defeated the Roman Catholic army of James II at the Battle of Boyne in Ireland.

In 1812 U.S. forces led by Gen. William Hull entered Canada during the War of 1812 against Britain. (Hull retreated shortly thereafter to Detroit.)

In 1854 George Eastman, inventor of the Kodak camera, was born in Water-ville, N.Y.

In 1864 scientist and educa-tor George Washington Carver was born near Diamond Grove, Mo.

In 1974 White House aide John Ehrlichman and three others were convicted of conspiring to violate the civil rights of Daniel Ells-berg's former psychiatrist.

In 1979 "Disco Demolition Night" got out of hand at Comiskey Park, forcing the White Sox to forfeit to the Detroit Tigers.

In 1984 Democratic pres-idential candidate Walter Mondale named Rep. Geraldine Ferraro of New York as his running mate. (Ferraro thus became the first woman to run for the vice presidency on a major-party ticket.)

In 1991 a Japanese professor who had translated Salman Rushdie's "The Satanic Verses" was found stabbed to death, nine days after the

novel's Italian translator was attacked in Milan.

In 1993 a magnitude-7.8 earthquake killed 196 people in northern Japan.

In 1995 President Bill Clin-ton spelled out school-prayer guidelines, asserting the 1st Amendment already guaranteed adequate free-dom of religion.

In 1998 France won its first World Cup, beating Brazil 3-0.

In 2003 the USS Ronald Reagan, the first carrier named for a living presi-dent, was commissioned in Norfolk, Va.

In 2012 opposition activists said as many as 200 people were killed in the farming village of Tremseh, Syria. Resident accounts contra-dict the account offered by Syrian authorities, who said no heavy weapons were used and that almost all the victims were insur-gents killed while attacking government forces.

In 2015 Mexico mounted an all-out manhunt for power-ful drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, who escaped through a mile-long tunnel from a maximum security prison 55 miles west of Mexico City.

In 2017 an investor group led by former Chicago Ald. Edwin Eisendrath and the Chicago Federation of Labor bought the Chicago Sun-Times, keeping the city's No. 2 paper in busi-ness and ending a bid by the Chicago Tribune's owner to acquire its longtime rival.

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Belynda Alberte, right, carries a snapping turtle out of the wetlands to be checked and documented during Blanding's Bowl week on June 22 in Lake County. Following behind her is Caitlin Mrowiec. **STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTOS**

TURTLES

from Page A1

"For an endangered turtle, that's pretty remarkable," said Gary Glowacki, manager of conservation ecology at the Lake County Forest Preserves District.

The scientists strategically set more than 100 traps across wetland and prairie habitats in the county, and inside placed sardines, cat food or store-bought salmon to lure the turtles. (One biologist believes the tinned fish make the best bait when coated in sriracha.) They then returned to the site every morning for three days to check up on their patients and release them.

And the fanfare was visible among the scientists, some of whom wore turtle earrings and custom-made T-shirts. But the primary focus of the bowl is to offer healthcare to turtles in the wild, Allender said. "We're their doctors. Nobody else is doing this."

"The fact that we're able to, in three and a half days, assess the health of one of the state's most endangered turtles is pretty amazing," he said in a follow-up call with the Tribune. "We won't have a lot of those test results for several months, but the effort in order to get (them) is really unparalleled anywhere else in the country."

Glowacki said the same. "There's not many people that are experts in the health and wellness of wild turtles, and they're right in our back-yard," he said.

After the scientists found stable footing on a sand pit, a painted turtle and a snapping turtle, recovered from traps, became their first patients of the day. Getting word from a nearby team, they then prepared for the arrival of a Blanding's turtle — the real star of the week.

First, the turtle was set on its back to be weighed. At 117 grams, it was lighter than a cup of all-purpose flour. Promptly dubbed Shrek by the scientists who found it, it was then handed off to Allender, who gently poked its beak with a Q-tip to start taking swab samples. The reptile opened up.

"Thank you," he said. "What a good turtle."

Eliza Baker, a resident veterinarian at a collaborative wildlife health management program between the University of Illinois, Brookfield Zoo and the Forest Preserves of Cook County, ran Allender through a checklist as he inspected the turtle more closely.

"Mouth?" Baker said. "Pink and moist," he replied. No plaques or lesions. "Nostrils?"

"Symmetrical." No upper respiratory infection.

Both are signs of a healthy specimen.

A few moments earlier, Baker had tended to the painted turtle, weighing and measuring it, swabbing and drawing blood.

"You can see something was trying to chew on him in the past," she said. "They're just such hardy animals. I mean, this is true of all our wildlife, but the things that they are able to live through, you can see the evidence of predation attempts and, like, old injuries."

She pointed at some dents on his shell and underside, possibly teeth and claw marks from a predator. Regardless, he looked like a "pretty happy, healthy little turtle."

Gail Bencsik protects a new Blanding's turtle by placing it in the pocket of her waders before returning it to wetland area where it was trapped on June 22. The new turtle is a 9-year-old juvenile that they have named Shrek or ABHKL. The name AHKL name refers to a series of notches placed in the turtle's shell to help later identify it.

Matt Allender, the director of conservation biology at Brookfield Zoo, uses a caliper to measure a Blanding's turtle while Eliza Baker, left, records information during Blanding's Bowl week on June 22.

Lake County, a "crown jewel" for Blanding's turtles in Illinois, is home to an assurance population, Allender explains — the state's largest and likeliest to survive over the next 50 to 100 years. And it's a busy year at the site, with the Super El Niño extending the water's reach and allowing the different turtle species to spread out.

Turtles are among the most endangered vertebrates on the planet; almost half of all 357 species are considered threatened. Compare that to 11,000 snake and lizard species. "It's not a very big group," Allender said.

Other threats to native turtles in Illinois include the loss and fragmentation of habitats like wetlands — of which Illinois has lost as much as 90% to development — as well as changes in habitat hydrology from dams and agricultural tile drainage and poaching for the exotic pet trade.

"That makes these populations, where Blanding's have persisted, critically important," Allender said. But it also means concentrations of individuals are vulnerable to localized catastrophic events such as floods, fires, disease and injury.

Glowacki said when he started studying wild Blanding's turtles more than a decade ago, this population was identified as the "biggest and best" of its kind in Lake County.

Back then, however, the turtles had a 95% chance of becoming extirpated within 50 years. First, there weren't enough young turtles to replace adults as raccoons preyed on eggs; most nests were being raided within the first 24 hours. And adults

were not surviving at a high enough rate.

At the site, Allender pointed out cracked eggshells around shallow holes in the sand. "They're all over," he noted.

"About one in 100 to 200 eggs laid will make it to adulthood," Allender later said. "If a Blanding's turtle lays 20 eggs in a year, it might take her five years to produce one offspring that would make it to adulthood, to supplant the population."

And so the Lake County Forest Preserves set out to improve survivorship for both older turtles and their offspring.

"And that's kind of where (Allender) and his team have really come in," Glowacki said. "That health component: What can we do to make sure these adults are surviving ...? Is it a health issue, or is it simply things like road mortality is too high?"

That population was stabilized and is now on a growth trajectory now, he added.

"Our initial goal was to have a viable, self-sustaining population," Glowacki said. "So we've been able to get to that viable population, but now we want to get to that self-sustaining, where we're a little bit (more) ... hands-off."

For a while, efforts to head start populations — that is, raising young, vulnerable turtles in captivity and then releasing them into the wild when they're better suited to survive — in other Lake County sites were paused when Emydomyces testavorans, a rare fungal disease, was discovered in three Blanding's turtles on private property in the county.

"We're starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel

for Emydomyces, where our treatments are effective," Glowacki said, setting the county up to resume releasing young turtles next year to continue establishing new, self-sustaining populations.

The success rate of the treatment, developed by the University of Illinois Wildlife Epidemiology Lab and Brookfield Zoo, is between 30% to 40%, Allender said, "which for a fungus in a slow-growing animal ... is better than I thought."

Running into the group of scientists, a Lake County resident enjoying the pleasant, sunny June afternoon asked Allender what would happen after numbers and data from tests are crunched.

"Save turtles. Save the world," he said.

"That's a heavy lift," the man replied.

"No kidding," Allender chuckled.

The longer answer: "I'm really attached to local wildlife," he told the Tribune. And, for his children and younger generations, he said, "I want to find a way (the turtles) can live in an urban and suburban environment without the need for constant protection."

Glowacki highlighted Blanding's turtles as a unique part of the area's natural heritage and history.

"I can't think of another animal that's more symbolic of the habitat we find in Lake County, the Chicago region, these coastal landscapes and ... marsh habitats, prairies and savannas," he said. "And you quickly learn that, by protecting and conserving Blanding's turtles, you're really protecting a whole suite of other species."

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