

# Laniakea, Oahu: Paradise for Turtle Watchers

also known as  
**Turtle Beach**  
and  
**Honulani**

Laniakea, Oahu, Hawaii, is without question the best place in the world to see marine turtles up close. Hawaiian green turtles crawl ashore almost daily to bask amid crowds of tourists and surfers, providing a unique turtle experience and unmatched photo opportunities.



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***Getting there***  
***(click on the map for a larger version)***

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[54K JPEG](#)  
[Map courtesy of Google Maps](#)

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In most parts of the world, sea turtles are shy, elusive creatures. This is partly because we humans have a long history of hunting them.

In Hawaii, however, this has been changing for several years now. Hawaiian green turtles have become more and more accustomed to seeing humans who won't harm them. This has led to exciting underwater viewing, as we have documented all over *Turtle Trax*, but these experiences are limited to SCUBA divers and snorkelers.

Not everyone can engage in these activities, yet anyone visiting Oahu can see a honu! That's because at various places around the Islands, the honu have been coming ashore to bask. Most of their basking beaches have few if any people around, but Lanikea is an exception.

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*A basking honu is perfectly happy to be the subject of photographs. To ensure that the turtles are not bothered, volunteers at Laniakea use red rope to mark off a "no-go" zone, and place signs to keep visitors informed. The turtle in the foreground doesn't get a red rope because even though it's a pretty good sand sculpture, it didn't fool the volunteers.*

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[63K JPEG](#)

[Photo courtesy George H. Balazs](#)

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Laniakea has always been pretty busy with crowds of tourists and surfers. The honu don't care, they crawl up onto the beach anyway. Tours busses stop and disgorge literally hundreds of tourists a day, all eager to see the turtles, snap pictures, and record video of their amazing experience. While this has resulted in thousands of thrilled turtle lovers, it is not without its down side.

Most people respect the turtles and admire them from a distance. Some, however, cannot resist getting too close and even touching the honu. People have even been know to sit on the turtles!

The increasing interaction between the honu and humans has prompted George Balazs, Leader of Marine Turtle Research for the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, Protected Species Division, to create a campaign that he's called:

### **Show Turtles Aloha**

*Objective of the Show Turtles Aloha campaign: "To enhance public appreciation and conservation of the recovering Hawaiian green turtle (honu) population through respectful wildlife viewing that promotes the Spirit of Aloha to both sea turtles and people."*

[Prospective volunteers and anyone else who is interested can learn more...](#)



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*Banners in both English and Japanese inform everyone visiting Laniakea Beach about the "Show Turtles Aloha" campaign.*

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[68K JPEG](#)  
*Photo courtesy George H. Balazs*

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This campaign educates people about the basking honu and how to behave around them. The idea is to maximize the turtle watcher's experience while minimizing the effects on the turtles. Some of the campaign literature is available here in PDF format. (You'll need the free [Adobe Reader](#) to view and print these documents.)

- [Hawaii Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Viewing Guidelines](#)
- [Feeding Causes Aggression](#)
- [Did You Know...? \(Facts about the Hawaiian green turtle\)](#)
- [Did You Know...? \(Japanese\)](#) (Facts about the Hawaiian green turtle in Japanese)
- [Honu & Coral Reef brochure](#)

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*Turtle fans demonstrate the perfect way to "Show Turtles Aloha" by admiring from a distance.*

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[48K JPEG](#)  
*Photo courtesy George H. Balazs*

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## Turtle Guardians

The "Show Turtles Aloha" campaign already has shown great results, but it needs your help. They're looking for volunteers to spend time at Laniakea handing out literature, educating the visitors, and making the Honu experience a positive one for people and turtles alike. Susan Scott, the noted marine science writer, described the program and her intention to volunteer in her [Honolulu Star-Bulletin column of December 2, 2005](#):

*"A few North Shore residents already volunteer in the "Show Turtles Aloha" program, but they need more helpers. I will soon be one of them. Please join me.*

*"I know. I'm busy, too, and it's a long drive to the North Shore. But our dear, gentle honu have learned to trust people now, and it's up to Hawaii residents to safeguard that trust."*

If you live on Oahu, please consider giving some of your time to help the honu at Laniakea. If you're planning to visit Oahu, you can still volunteer to spend a day at Laniakea, or as many days as you'd like to spend with the turtles. For detailed information, be sure to read [the campaign description](#).

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### Related Links

- [Conservation at work on North Shore](#) (Ocean Watch column by Susan Scott, December 9, 2005 Honolulu Star-Bulletin)
  - [Turtle trouble](#) (Story, August 14, 2005 Honolulu Star-Bulletin)
  - [Police should bring order to beach popular with turtles](#) (Editorial, August 16 Honolulu Star-Bulletin)
  - [Comeback](#) (Story, January 5, 2004 Honolulu Star-Bulletin)
  - [Hotel's turtles stir memories of isle friends](#) (Ocean Watch column by Susan Scott, May 5, 2006 Honolulu Star-Bulletin)
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## *A Laniakea Photo Gallery*

Click on any image for a larger version. All images courtesy of George H. Balazs and the "Show Turtles Aloha" campaign.

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***Basking turtle showing the red rope***

[45K JPEG](#)

*Photo courtesy George H. Balazs*

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***Photographer gets excellent honu photo opportunity***

[53K JPEG](#)

*Photo courtesy George H. Balazs*

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*Two baskers sharing the red rope*

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[49K JPEG](#)

*Photo courtesy George H. Balazs*

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*Two young honu fans pose with one of the "Show Turtles Aloha" signs*

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[49K JPEG](#)

*Photo courtesy George H. Balazs*

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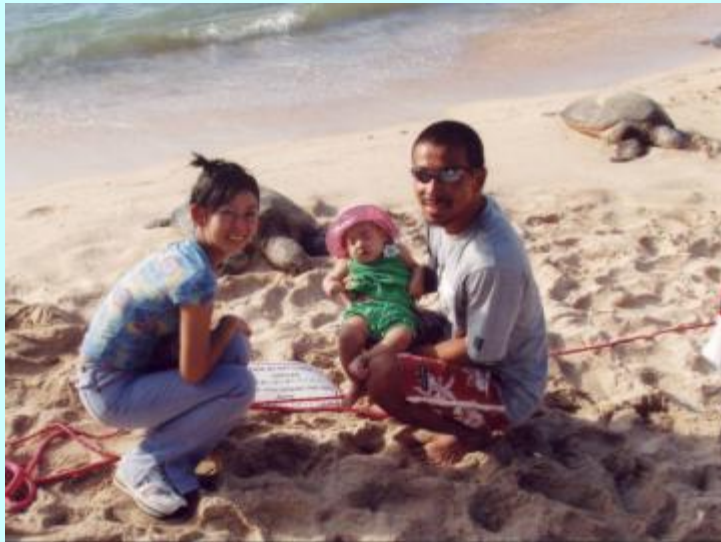
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***A family posing with two  
baskers***

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[53K JPEG](#)  
*Photo courtesy George H. Balazs*

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***Basking honu with  
informative "Show Turtles  
Aloha" sign in the  
foreground***

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[51K JPEG](#)  
*Photo courtesy George H. Balazs*

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***Please take one: Show  
Turtles Aloha information  
brochures***

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[47K JPEG](#)  
*Photo courtesy George H. Balazs*

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***The Laniakea Show  
Turtles Aloha campaign  
visitor's log***

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[45K JPEG](#)  
*Photo courtesy George H. Balazs*

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**Some comments from the visitor's log**

[46K JPEG](#)

[Photo courtesy George H. Balazs](#)

DATE	YOUR COMMENTS	NAME & MAILING ADDRESS	YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS
Oct 11 2005	When you catch the turtles swimming in water from the 11th floor the seem huge up here they are enormous thank you for protecting them so everyone could enjoy them.	New York Visitors	Edan@nyu.edu edanthink.net
Oct 11 2005	Amazing! They are so cute in water. They are bigger than we imagined!	Primary Site	stantal@panopticon.org
Oct 11 2005	They are very beautiful. It was very nice to see them. Hope someone will label them.	Wobler, NJ	RS: @hotmail.net

DATE	YOUR COMMENTS	NAME & MAILING ADDRESS	YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS
10/14/05	Love this little cove! This is the 2nd time I've stopped here to see the turtles. You're doing good, important work!	Chuck Barney 312 Killingsworth Vacaville Ca 95687	Cbarney@cctimes.com
10/14	Thank you for taking care of this beach and the turtles.	Deanna Burdick 90 Backsight Luling, TX 77643	Kief@kts.com
11/4	THANKS FOR MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE!! KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK... WE LOVE TURTLES...	JOHN DeSANTIS LYNN McEELLES EDMONTOWN, NEW JERSEY	SOLEMAN1968@Yahoo.COM

**More comments from the visitor's log**

[57K JPEG](#)

[Photo courtesy George H. Balazs](#)

**The MTRP PIFSC Honulani Visitor's Logbook at Laniakea Beach on Oahu's North Shore**

**359 Days of the "Show Turtles Aloha" Campaign  
7 July 2005 - 30 June 2006**

These documents are PDF files.

- [1151 Primarily Favorable, Non-Negative, and/or Neutral Comments](#)
- [48 Primarily Negative Comments](#)

# Slides from a Presentation by George Balazs Explaining the *Show Turtles Aloha* Campaign and Correcting Common Misunderstandings

## "Show Turtles Aloha" Campaign Objective

To enhance public appreciation of the recovering Hawaiian green turtle population through respectful viewing that imparts the Spirit of Aloha to both turtles and people.

## WHAT MAKES LANIAKEA SPECIAL?

- World famous surfing site
- Panoramic view of the ocean
- Easy access from Kamehameha Hwy
- Sandy-bottom swimming cove
- Sea turtles basking and foraging

## THE LANIAKEA SEA TURTLE APPEAL

### Love - Curiosity - Culture

- See and take pictures of turtles in the wild
- Symbol of long life and good luck
- 'Aumākua protective family spirit for some Hawaiian families
- Food as sustenance and source of cultural identity for some Hawaiians

A showcase for sea turtle restoration  
unlike any other worldwide

## COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS

- People standing on the beach or close to the water prevent turtles from coming out to bask
- People sometimes build sand castles on the backs of turtles
- A basking turtle has been disturbed if it opens its eyes and raises its head to breathe
- Turtles are bothered by the numerous people at Laniakea

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["Show Turtles Aloha" campaign description](#)

[Turtle Trax home page](#)

Last modified 06/10/14

Send comments or corrections to [webmaster@turtles.org](mailto:webmaster@turtles.org)

# The "Show Turtles Aloha" Campaign

This is an introduction to "Show Turtles Aloha" from George Balazs, a founding member and original leader of the campaign. It is intended for prospective volunteers interested in becoming Honu Guardians at Laniakea Beach on the North Shore of Oahu, and for anyone who wants to learn more about the project.

**IMPORTANT NOTE: As of December, 2007 anyone interested in volunteering should refer to the Malama Na Honu Foundation website:**

[www.malamanahonu.org](http://www.malamanahonu.org)

**References to George Balazs and Joanne Pettigrew are retained for historical archival purposes only.**

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*Dear Prospective Volunteer:*

*Thank you very much for seeking additional information about the "Show Turtles Aloha" campaign here in the Hawaiian Islands. We certainly welcome your interest in volunteering as a "Honu Guardian" at Laniakea Beach on Oahu's beautiful and historic North Shore. If you continue to have interest in volunteering after reading this and other materials available on the web site, please contact me directly by email ([gbalazs@honulab.nmfs.hawaii.edu](mailto:gbalazs@honulab.nmfs.hawaii.edu)). Please provide some background information about yourself and your potential availability to volunteer. Please also copy your email to Joanne Pettigrew (email address redacted) in the event that I am on travel away from email access when you send your message. Joanne is a co-founding member of the Show Turtles Aloha campaign who has lived near Laniakea Beach for many years.*

*Learning to do the duties of a volunteer at Laniakea involves a period of "shadowing" an experienced volunteer for on-the-job training. If you live on Oahu, after contacting Joanne you will be invited to come to Laniakea on any day that you can between 11:30 am to sunset, seven days a week. On each of these visits you will stay as long as it is convenient for you to do so. You will introduce yourself to whomever is on duty as a volunteer. That person (or persons) will be prominent by the badge label worn that says "Honu Guardian and Naturalist--Questions? Please ask me." On certain days that person will be me or Joanne Pettigrew.*

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*The Honu Guardian sticker*

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[48K JPEG](#)

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*Once at the beach you will be invited to spend time watching and listening and talking to the volunteer while she or he does the things we do. "Shadowing" the person for the learning experience will help you to decide if this style of work is the right thing for you. Several shadowing (teamed-up) training visits will be needed before you are eligible to be assigned a day, or a half day, volunteering on your own. Our volunteer days most often run from 11:30 am until sunset. Or, when there are two daily shifts- usually 11:30 am to 2:30 pm, and 2:30 pm to sunset. However, flexibility is always possible to meet the individual needs of the volunteers. And shifts are modified with the coming of the summer months when the days are longer, sunnier, and more folks visit Laniakea for recreation and to see the turtles*

*We have no special qualifications for volunteering except that you 1) like people, 2) like talking to and appreciate a diversity of people, 3) like the honu, and like to spread the Spirit of Aloha to both the people and the honu. And of course 4) you must be dependable, law abiding, a decent person of sane mind, and drug free.*

*What we want to be sure of, and what you want to be sure of yourself, is that your style, preferences, and personality are conducive to the Laniakea setting and needs and philosophy of the Show Turtles Aloha campaign. You have to enjoy talking, enjoy giving gentle requests for cooperation, enjoy answering questions-lots of questions. Nearly all the answers to questions are in our handouts made available at Laniakea (see [the Laniakea page](#)). The answers to questions that aren't in our literature will come to you easily with the learning experience received during training from us.*

*It's very important to be aware that we are not enforcement agents. There is no "force of law" in the routine things we ask people to do in order to be well behaved in the presence of the honu. We are strictly "educational outreach" people promoting the message of respectful sea turtle watching. We teach and promote the practice of showing good manners around the turtles. We have several tools and techniques we use, including laying out red ropes in the sand when a turtle first starts to come out, and later when the turtle has come to rest and is basking--warming its body.*



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***The red rope  
allows close  
observation  
without  
disturbing the  
basking honu***

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[49K JPEG](#)

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*We ask for the public's cooperation in being respectful. (I.e "Please don't walk over the red ropes, please don't touch the turtles, and please don't try to feed the turtles as they will become aggressive and bite people in the water.") We sometimes have to urge cooperation in a diplomatically friendly but firm fashion. 99.5% of the time we get what we are reasonably seeking--cooperation. However, in a small number of cases consisting of all ages, ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, and socio-economic groups, we get... non-compliance. What we do in those cases is to restate our objective for being there ("to watch over the turtles with Aloha--please do not touch, crowd, feed, or chase"), say "Thank you for listening to what we said," and then... excuse yourself and politely walk away. Without being angry and upset (though perhaps disappointed a better outcome was not immediately achieved).*

*I believe that the Laniakea experience is a great and wonderful "learning and teaching arena " for the right persons interest in volunteer work. Useful lessons are constantly being learned and taught that will last a life time. For you, and for thousands of others. We look forward to hearing from you.*

*With Best Regards and Aloha,  
George Balazs*

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[Laniakea, Oahu](#): A magical place where the honu bask along with the tourists.

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Send comments or corrections to [webmaster@turtles.org](mailto:webmaster@turtles.org)