

INFORMATION UPDATE 808: Rescue and Release of the 808th Hawaiian Sea Turtle since 1990 Coincides with the 10th Anniversary of the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center

This year NOAA proudly celebrates the 10th Anniversary of the creation of the Hawaii-based Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) devoted to marine research, environmental stewardship, and public service, with emphasis on the Pacific Islands Region (PIR). Prior to 2003 the Hawaii facility now known as the PIFSC was a field laboratory of the Southwest Fisheries Science Center based in La Jolla, California.

First funded as a Congressional Initiative by the late Senator Daniel K. Inouye, sea turtle stranding response and research is an important facet of the PIFSC's Protected Species Division (PSD). The success of this activity, especially since 1990, is a direct reflection of the partnerships and excellent cooperative dedication between many state, federal and private agencies and, most importantly, the public. All sea turtles are protected under the US Endangered Species Act and wildlife laws of the State of Hawaii. Beginning in 1990, the Marine Turtle Research Program of the PSD initiated a state-wide program to help injured and sick stranded sea turtles.

Twenty-three years later the 808th turtle in trouble has now been given aid by Good Samaritan members of the public in Kailua Bay on Oahu. Life-threatening fishing line strangling the body and a front flipper was removed. The turtle was found struggling for survival. After carefully disentangling and cutting the fishing line off, the turtle was

promptly released and swam away to the Cheers of Aloha by the rescuers. Turtles like this are the lucky ones. Others tangled in fishing line have a flipper so severely damaged that amputation surgery by a veterinarian is required to save the turtle's life. Since 1990, 62 such amputations have been necessary. A sea turtle with a missing front flipper can indeed survive reasonably well in the wild following release, but greater effort is needed to swim and feed in a normal fashion. It should be noted that the vast majority of cases involving fishing line entanglement are associated with shoreline recreational fishing. In some cases the turtle is attracted to the fishing bait.

In addition to the good deed of helping Hawaii's marine wildlife, valuable data are collected on the turtle rescued, usually including size, weight, location where the turtle was found, cause of the problem, and in many cases tagging the turtle with a microchip so the animal can be identified if found again in the future. All information collected is stored in computer databases for present and future analyses.

Most of the turtles rescued (63%) are on Oahu, followed by the Big Island (19%) and Maui (11%). The green turtle, known in the Hawaiian language as honu, is the most common turtle rescued (96%), followed by small numbers of hawksbills (honu'ea), olive ridleys and one case of a loggerhead, a species seldom found in near shore waters of the Hawaiian Islands. There have been 13 different categories documented as reasons for a turtle needing to be rescued and helped. The most common reason is line strangulation usually involving a front flipper (274 of the 808 turtles or 34%). The next most frequent rescue reason was fishing hooks (128- 16%) usually stuck in the body of

a turtle without entanglement by fishing line. The third most frequent category for a rescue was entanglement in fishing net (105- 13%), some of which involves net debris originating from the high seas. All 13 categories with frequency of occurrence for rescued turtles are shown in the accompanying table, along with other information about the 808 lucky turtles of Hawaii.

The NOAA PIR hosts the web site "Fishing Around Sea Turtles" to promote co-existence of fishers and sea turtles by providing helpful fishing tips on how to reduce interactions and what to do if a turtle is accidentally entangled or hooked. Please see the following and please remember "It's OK to Help Turtles".

<http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_fishing_around_sea_turtles.html>

The 808th turtle rescued, helped and released since 1990 was selected because of the number 808's special significance to Hawaii and wide use in contemporary island-style culture. Coincidentally and happily, 808 was also the highest number of nesting green turtles counted annually (in 2011) during the 40 consecutive seasons monitored by the PIFSC in partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. In 1973 when counts started, there were 67 nesting green turtles at the index beach (of East Island at French Frigate Shoals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands).

If you encounter a sea turtle in trouble or a dead turtle on the beach, please call the

PIFSC's turtle standing response line on Oahu [808-983-5730](tel:808-983-5730). For strandings of turtles on the Neighbor Islands, please refer to the above website for numbers to dial.

NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center

808 Rescues, Rehabilitations and Ocean Returns of Hawaiian Marine Turtles 1990 - May 2013

CAUSE OF STRANDING RESCUES

	No. of Turtles	Percent
Fishing Line Strangulation	274	33.9%
Fishing Hooks	128	15.8%
Fishing Net Entanglement	105	13.0%
Tumor Affliction	92	11.4%
Trapped	63	7.8%
Abnormal Behavior	61	7.5%
Flooding Ashore by Tsunami	30	3.7%
Wounds	25	3.1%
Weak Hatchlings	9	1.1%
Shark Attack	8	1.0%
Illegal Take	6	0.7%
Buoyancy Problem	4	0.5%
Fishing Line Ingestion	3	0.4%
Total	808	100.0%

SURGICAL FLIPPER AMPUTATIONS DUE TO LINE STRANGULATION

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SPECIES

	No. of Turtles	Percent
Hawaiian green turtle (honu; <i>Chelonia mydas</i>)	775	95.9%
Hawksbill (honu'ea; <i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>)	21	2.6%
Olive ridley (<i>Lepidochelys olivacea</i>)	11	1.4%
Loggerhead (<i>Caretta caretta</i>)	1	0.1%
Total	808	100.0%

ISLANDS

	No. of Turtles	Percent
Oahu	512	63.4%
Hawaii (Big Island)	152	18.8%
Maui	92	11.4%
Kauai	24	3.0%
Lanai	5	0.6%
Molokai	4	0.5%
Northwestern Hawaiian Islands	19	2.4%
Total	808	100.0%



Good Samaritan “Honu Heroes” untangling and cutting fishing line snarled tightly around the flipper of the 808th sea turtle helped in the Hawaiian Islands since 1990. The line was successfully removed and the turtle was happily released in good condition.

“It’s OK to Help Turtles.”