

Afflicted Ones Not Used for Food

12/8/1966 Herald

Warty Turtles Baffle Fishermen on Keys

MONROE COUNTY

By DAVE WEBB

Herald Correspondent

MARATHON — An investigation is underway in the Florida Keys to find the cause and possible cure of wart-appearing growths on green turtles taken from local waters.

The public need not be alarmed, or refuse to eat the sea delicacy, for all afflicted turtles are being turned over for research and are not being used for food.

Dr. Robert Schroeder, research scientist and turtle raiser, of Lower Matecumbe Key, has requested that any person catching a green turtle with warty growths contact him. His phone number is 664-4858.

He is interested in determining the extent, cause and possible cure of the disease, and would like to have small turtles with such unnatural growths to observe and treat at his turtle observatory on Lower Matecumbe Key.

Schroeder has been instrumental in promoting a turtle restocking program which he hopes will help restore the rapidly diminishing reptiles.

The green turtle is considered the world's most valuable edible reptile.

Among the possible causes of the increasing skin growths could be mutation, pesticides, radiation, chemical fertilizers or concentrations of chemical wastes in certain areas.

Conservation laws have been established in recent years to protect the green and other turtles, which lay their eggs on many Florida coastal beaches, especially the Keys, Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties.

Caribbean Islanders for several centuries, at least.

Over 90 per cent of all sea turtle landings in Florida are made at Florida Key fish houses. The meat is considered a delicacy here and is shipped to finer restaurants over the nation. There is a turtle chowder soup producer in Islamorada in the Upper Keys.

Edison "Blackie" Cruz, who manages a turtle hatchery and observatory on Ramroad Key, for State Senator John Spottswood, said that one type of wart growth had been rarely observed for a number of years on specimens taken from local waters. Cruz has 165 green and loggerhead turtles in his hatchery and has been interested in the sea reptiles for over 40 years.

Cruz, Schroeder, and others have released thousands of turtles during the past seven years after caring for them until they reach hand size or larger.

* * *

THE MORTALITY rate of green turtles, and other sea turtles, when hatched naturally is said to be over 90 per cent during the first few weeks of their lives. Animals, birds, fish and shark are known to feast on them when they are very young.

Thousands of sea turtles are hatched on Florida beaches each year and literally hundreds of persons in South Florida help place them in sea waters where they become confused because of man made lights along beaches and crawl to highways instead of the ocean.

"To the best of our knowledge, no turtles released in our re-stocking program have had, or developed, the unusual wart-like condition," Schroeder stated again Wednesday, after investigating the situation since it was called to his attention by Ted Clark of Marathon, Friday.

* * *

TURTLE MEAT was a diet mainstay for many



Down the Ramp Come Tasty Turtles
...warty ones aren't eaten.