SEA TURTLE CULTURE

The development of sea turtles as an aquacultural product is limited only by the need to study their nutrition and management. The success of these two phases of research will not only demonstrate the feasibility of rearing sea turtles commercially but will also insure the survival of those now on the list on endangered species as well as the remaining dwindling species.

The eggs of sea turtles are generally laid in a concentrated nesting area which makes it convenient to collect nests for removal to a more convenient hatchery where they can be successfully protected from predation. Techniques presently exist for moving such nests with a high degree of success in hatching.

A few days after emergence from the nest the hatchlings become self-feeding and will readily accept and grow on formulated diets. Present studies show that young green hatchlings will consume an experimental diet consisting of commonly available feedstuffs. Growth curves are presently being developed on these formulated diets. As the nutritional requirements become known growth rates and efficiency will increase.

Development of management techniques will ultimately result in automated feeding, waste disposal and water replenishment systems. Ultimately, those animals having the most desirable attributes will be reared to adulthood to serve as the nucleus of a breeding herd.

Concurrent studies on behavior and physiology may well lead to artificial methods of breeding, and artificial stimulation of egg production, as is presently done with poultry. As a matter of fact, one of the most encouraging things about the potential of sea turtles is their similarity, in many respects, to poultry, and the possibility of adapting many poultry techniques to the rearing and propagation of sea turtles.