

# Green Sea Turtle Surprises the Experts, Nests on Oahu

By Harry Whitten  
Star-Bulletin Writer

The first recorded case of a green sea turtle nesting on one of the main Hawaiian Islands has occurred on Oahu, according to George H. Balazs, marine biologist and authority on sea turtles.

The green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) and other sea turtles are protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

The nesting took place on a fairly remote beach site on Oahu's north shore, where tracks and digging of a sea turtle were found in early August, Balazs said.

"Over the following four-week period a few more diggings were noted but no one actually saw the turtle to make an identification," he said. "On a later visit to the area, numerous small tracks were found in the sand, indicating that a nest had hatched out."

BALAZS CAREFULLY excavated the site to look for any eggs that had failed to develop fully and found several. The species was positively identified as the green turtle.

He speculated that the turtle or turtles (there could possibly have been two) might be strays which ordinarily breed at French Frigate Shoals. Another possibility is that one or more of the big turtles that have been released from captivity at Sea Life Park, the Waikiki Aquarium and the Kahala Hilton Hotel in recent years had chosen to nest on the north shore, he said.

David Woodside and Rick Coleman of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service assisted Balazs by reporting their observations to him.

The plan is to monitor the beach site next summer to see if more nestings take place, he said.

THE GREEN SEA turtle lives in

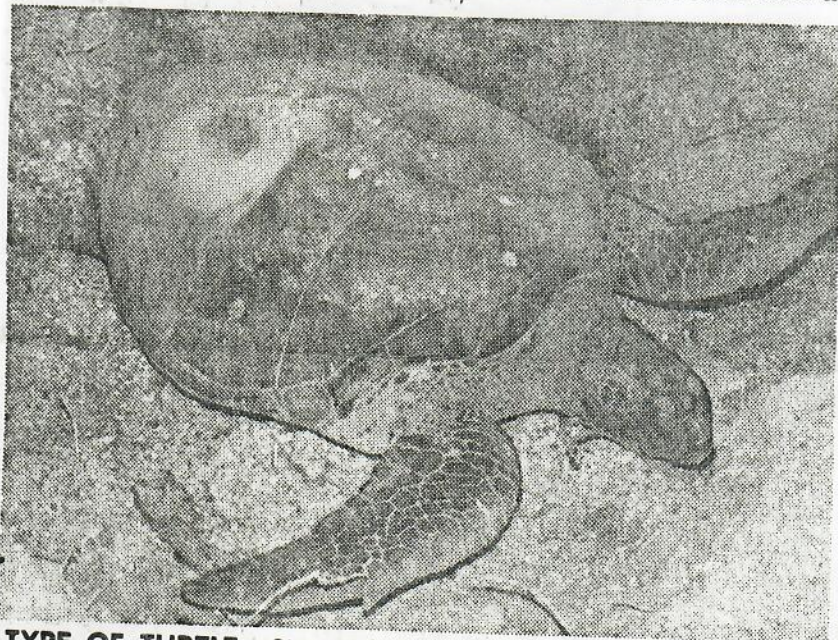
waters around the main Hawaiian Islands but migrates to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands when it comes time to breed, he said. French Frigate Shoals is by far the favorite site, with at least 90 percent of all green turtle nesting now known in Hawaii occurring on several sand islets within the shoals, he said.

Up until the early 1900s, green turtles also were known to nest on the north shore of Lanai at the beach called Pōihua (literally "egg nest"). Turtles could be caught here easily by flipping them over and dragging them off. "Continuous hunting of this sort year after year apparently cleaned them all out," Balazs said.

A second species of sea turtle that lives in Hawaii, the hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), nests in small numbers, mostly on the Big Island and Molokai.

A third species, the leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) also is found in ocean waters surrounding Hawaii but it is usually a Mainland turtle.

Balazs, a biologist with the University of Hawaii's Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology, now is working under contract with the Honolulu laboratory of the National Marine Fisheries Service.



TYPE OF TURTLE—Signs of the nesting of a green sea turtle like this one, on a remote beach site on Oahu's North Shore, was found in early August.

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