



HAWAIIAN
GREEN SEA TURTLES
Recovering yet still protected



NOAA SEA TURTLE REPORTING INFORMATION

For injured or dead turtles:

O'ahu/Lāna'i/Moloka'i

(808) 725-5730 (primary)

(808) 286-4377 (after hours)

Kaua'i

(808) 274-3344

Maui

(808) 286-2549 (primary)

(808) 286-2899

Hawai'i

(808) 286-4359 (Hilo)

(808) 881-4200 (N. Kona)

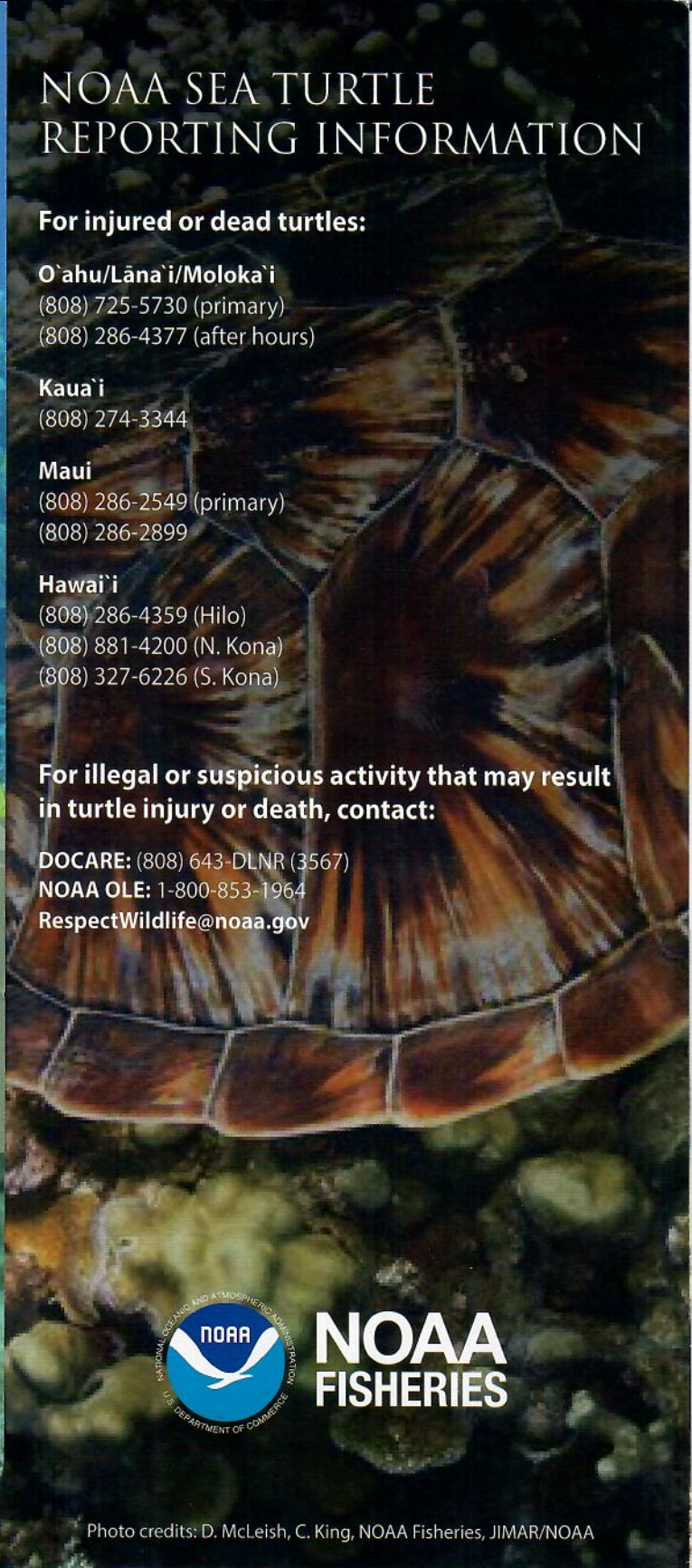
(808) 327-6226 (S. Kona)

For illegal or suspicious activity that may result in turtle injury or death, contact:

DOCARE: (808) 643-DLNR (3567)

NOAA OLE: 1-800-853-1964

RespectWildlife@noaa.gov



**NOAA
FISHERIES**

Photo credits: D. McLeish, C. King, NOAA Fisheries, JIMAR/NOAA



UNIQUE TO HAWAII

The global green turtle population is classified into 11 threatened and endangered Distinct Population Segments. Hawaiian green turtles (*honu*) are genetically distinct and spatially isolated from all other populations. They remain protected under state and federal laws as a “threatened” species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Status

As a result of protections, the nesting population has increased over the last two decades by 5% per year, with almost 800 females nesting annually (compared with 67 turtles in 1973).

If the population is recovering, why is it still protected? Reasons include:

- Small isolated population in the Central North Pacific (less than 4,000 total nesting females) with low genetic diversity
- Anticipated climate impacts
- Extremely limited spatial distribution — 96% of the population nests at one low-lying atoll that is very susceptible to erosion and habitat loss from sea level rise
- Accidental catch in shore-based fisheries

PRIMARY THREATS

- **Increasing temperatures and sea level rise** may affect nesting and foraging habitats, alter sex ratios, effect nesting success and hatchling survival.
- **Bycatch** in shore-based fisheries (hook and line, crab trap, and gillnet) can entangle, injure, or kill turtles.
- **Disease** such as fibropapillomatosis (FP) can cause debilitating and sometimes life-threatening tumors. Although FP has declined over time, it persists in the population and may be related to poor or degraded habitat quality.
- **Boats or jetskis** can strike turtles that live near harbors or in shallow reef habitats.
- **Coastal development and pollution**, beach armoring, erosion, and urban/agricultural runoff can damage or reduce the quality of habitats.
- **Other threats** include entanglement in marine debris, predators, and illegal hunting.



Top image: Green turtle with FP tumors on neck and flipper.



Bottom image: Deceased green turtle entangled in a fishing line.

YOU CAN HELP!

- **"It's OK to help!"** Fishermen, check your gear often and, if safe to do so, release turtles from gear (cut line close to hook). Help remove derelict gear and line from reefs to prevent entanglement.



- **View turtles from a distance of 10 feet (3 meters).** Give turtles space. Human disturbance can disrupt normal behavior and cause stress.
- **Never feed directly or indirectly.** Do not unintentionally feed turtles when cleaning fish at harbors or from your boat.
- **Post-a-Watch on your boat** to look out for marine wildlife to prevent boat strikes. Ensure "turtle safe" transit (5–10 knots) near harbors and in shallow reef habitats where turtles tend to live.
- **Avoid beach driving.** Off-road vehicles crush nests, create tire ruts that trap hatchlings, and degrade habitats.
- **Prevent debris and rubbish from entering the ocean.** Participate in beach and reef cleanup activities.
- **Volunteer** with a sea turtle program. Contact RespectWildlife@noaa.gov for information.
- **Report injured or dead turtles, nesting activities or baby hatchlings** to the phone numbers located on the back of this brochure.

FISHING AROUND TURTLES

An accidental turtle interaction can occur when fishing. Fishermen are encouraged to help prevent deadly entanglement by following these best-practice guidelines:

SAFETY FIRST

If safe to help...

1. **Reel-in** turtle
2. **Hold turtle** by shell/flippers
3. **Cut line** close to hook
4. **ID-green** or hawksbill?
5. **Release with no line attached**

REMEMBER TO:

- ✓ Check bait after every nibble
- ✓ Use barbless circle hooks to reduce injuries
- ✓ Clean your catch away from turtles



GREEN OR HAWKSBILL?

Both species occur in Hawaiian waters, yet hawksbill turtles are rare. Learn to identify the difference and report any hawksbill sightings to NOAA or Hlhawkbills.org.

Green / Honu
Chelonia mydas



- Rounded head



- 2 pre-frontal scales (between eyes)

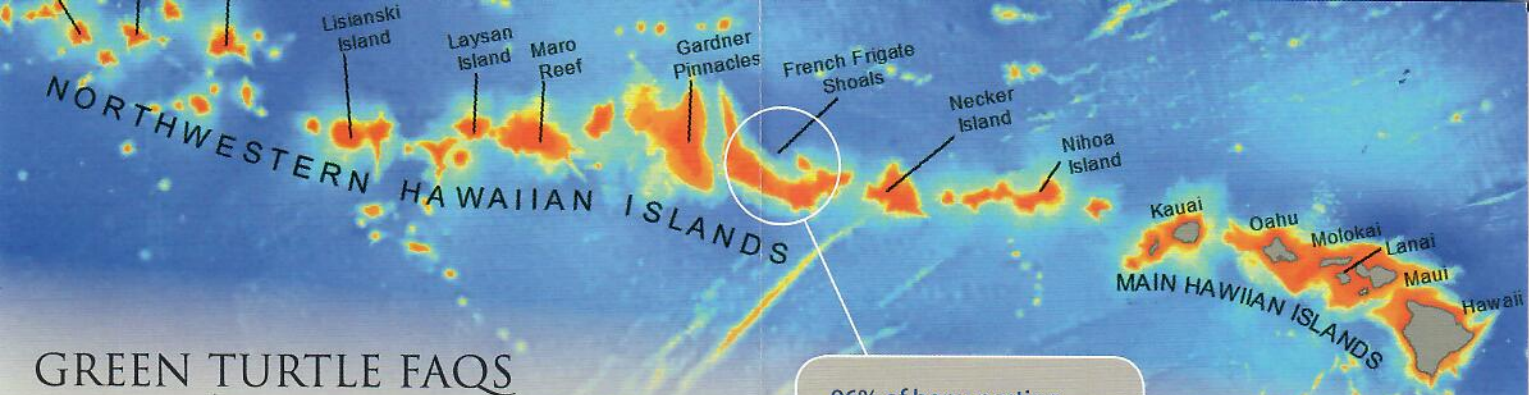
Hawksbill / `Ea / Honu`ea
Eretmochelys imbricata



- Narrow head and pointed beak



- 4 pre-frontal scales (between eyes)



GREEN TURTLE FAQs

- Green turtles are air-breathing marine reptiles that depend on land, sea, and healthy reef habitats.
- Green turtles are named after the color of their body fat due to their herbivorous (vegetarian) diet.
- Honu feed primarily on red and green algae (known as *limu*), seagrass, and invertebrates (such as jellyfish).
- Adults grow to 3 to 4 feet in shell length and weigh upwards of 350 pounds.
- Adults can hold their breath for up to three hours while resting, but typically surface every 15 to 30 minutes to breathe.
- The age of first reproduction (sexual maturity) is between 25 to 35 years old.
- Honu nesting and hatching season spans May to December.
- Adult females typically nest every 4 years, returning to the same geographic location where they hatched to nest.

96% of honu nesting occurs at French Frigate Shoals in the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, with some sporadic nesting activity occurring throughout the main Hawaiian Islands.

- Each female lays an average of four nests in a season.
- Each clutch (nest) of eggs contains an average of 100 eggs that incubate for about two months, depending on temperature.

- Incubation temperature of the nest determines a hatchling's sex — warmer nests produce females, and cooler nests produce males.



- Hatchlings typically emerge from the nest at night and find the ocean by crawling towards the brighter, open horizon.

VIEW TURTLES RESPECTFULLY

View sea turtles on land and in the water from a respectful distance of 10 feet (3 meters).

It is common for Hawaiian honu to rest (bask) on the beach.



SEA TURTLES IN HAWAIIAN CULTURE

As indigenous species in Hawai'i, sea turtles play an important role in Hawaiian cultural traditions and *mo'olelo* (stories).

Honu (green turtle) and *'ea* or *honu'ea* (hawksbill turtle) are mentioned in the fourth verse of the *Kumulipo*, the Hawaiian creation chant. Some families continue to revere sea turtles as their *'aumāku*a, spiritual guardian.

Traditionally, sea turtles were incorporated into native practices, religious ceremonies, and diet. Shells, bones and oil were used to make fish hooks, tools, jewelry, and medicine. Harvest was tightly regulated by traditional management practices of the *kapu* system (cultural rules, code of conduct) enacted by Chiefs or *Ali'i*.

