

May 29, 1974 (Wed.)

Turtle-steak ban begins tomorrow

By BRUCE BENSON
Advertiser Staff Writer

Turtle steaks in Hawaii's restaurants and stores will become an extinct offering beginning tomorrow in order to prevent the same fate from befalling the turtles themselves.

A regulation passed recently by the State Board of Land and Natural Resources will make it illegal to possess or sell the green sea, the leatherback and the hawksbill turtles.

WHILE THE TURTLE-STEAK ban will start tomorrow, a grace period will be allowed for restaurants to serve up any turtles they may buy before the regulation takes effect.

It is expected that in the weeks ahead, turtle offerings will gradually wither away to nothing, which is what had been happening to the turtles.

Passage of the new turtle rules came after a full year of discussions and public hearings throughout the State.

The rules carry the endorsement of the State Animal Species Advisory Commission, which helped get them formulated. The rules state that:

- You can't take turtles from waters within the jurisdiction of the State, nor can you possess or sell such turtles, unless:

- You have a permit from the board of Land and Natural Resources to take turtles for scientific, educational or propagational purposes.

- You have a permit to take green sea turtles with upper shell lengths of 36 inches or more from waters around the eight major islands of Hawaii for home consumption only.

You also will need a permit if you are a restaurateur who wishes to sell turtles after tomorrow that were acquired before tomorrow.

Other parts of the rules state that you cannot use nets to take green sea turtles for any reason, and that you can eat a turtle at home -- without a permit -- if you caught it before tomorrow.

There is only one little loophole in the regulations, whose purpose and function remains to be seen. It is a clause stating that you can legally possess or sell the eggs or offspring of captive green sea turtles, or products from those turtles, if you have a lawful permit issued by the Board of Land and Natural Resources.

APPLICATIONS for turtle permits can be obtained by applying in person at any Division of Fish and Game office. Applications for scientific collecting permits, however, must be made in writing to the Honolulu office of the Division of Fish and Game.

The purpose of the regulations is to give marine turtles -- particularly the green sea species -- some time to replenish their numbers. Hunting pressure has increased dramatically in recent years because of a demand in tourist restaurants.

STAR-BULLETIN

May 31, 1974

Endangered Turtles

It's a pleasure to note one victory in the efforts, often frustrating, to save animals whose survival is endangered.

This is the adoption by the State Board of Land and Natural Resources of regulations to protect sea turtles, seen sometimes but not as often as formerly, in Hawaiian waters. The turtle population has declined drastically because of the demand for turtle meat in restaurants, for turtle shells in curio shops.

The new regulations should be of particular gratification to George H. Balazs, of the University of Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology, who sounded the alarm and led the campaign to protect the turtles.

Under the regulations, adopted after a year of public hearings and discussions, the taking of leatherbacks, hawksbill and green sea turtles is prohibited, with certain exceptions.

Actually, the green turtle is the only one of consequence in the Hawaiian Islands; it's officially listed as depleted although its numbers have declined so much that many scientists think it should be listed as an endangered species.

Two bills affecting turtles failed to make it through the last session of the Legislature. One would have imposed a moratorium on taking turtles and the other would have released up to \$35,000 for research and management studies.

While conservationists may regret failure of the bills to pass, the new regulations should help give turtles a chance to replenish their numbers.

Loophole puts sea turtle into the frying pan

By **BRUCE BENSON**
Advertiser Science Writer

On May 30 of this year Hawaii adopted a rule to save the green sea turtle by banning all sales of turtle products . . . with one little exception.

From that little exception, two men have started selling frozen green turtle steaks to restaurants throughout the State. A memo from the Attorney General's Office says they are acting in a perfectly legal way.

Their legal standing aside, conservationists and scientists have started complaining that the two men are circumventing the intention of the new turtle regulation.

THEY SAY the green sea turtle will wind up in as much, and probably more, danger than it was before the regulation was adopted.

The argument becomes thicker than turtle soup because the importers of the steaks say they are actually helping to save the turtle, not hasten its extinction.

A little background:

The Board of Land and Natural Resources, after a year of hearings, adopted the turtle rule in order to take hunting pressure off the green sea turtle.

The intention of the rule was to outlaw commercial use of turtle products, giving the green sea turtle some time to replenish its numbers in the wild.

The rule says, however, that you may "possess or sell the eggs or offspring of captive green sea turtles" and you may sell marine turtles or their products if you owned them before May 30 of this year.

THE REASONING behind the clause was to ensure that turtle farming could stay in business, according to Russell Fukumoto, Hawaii deputy attorney general.

There is only one large commercial turtle farm in existence at the moment. It is operated by Mariculture Ltd., a predominantly British-staffed firm, on Grand Cayman Island in the Bahamas.

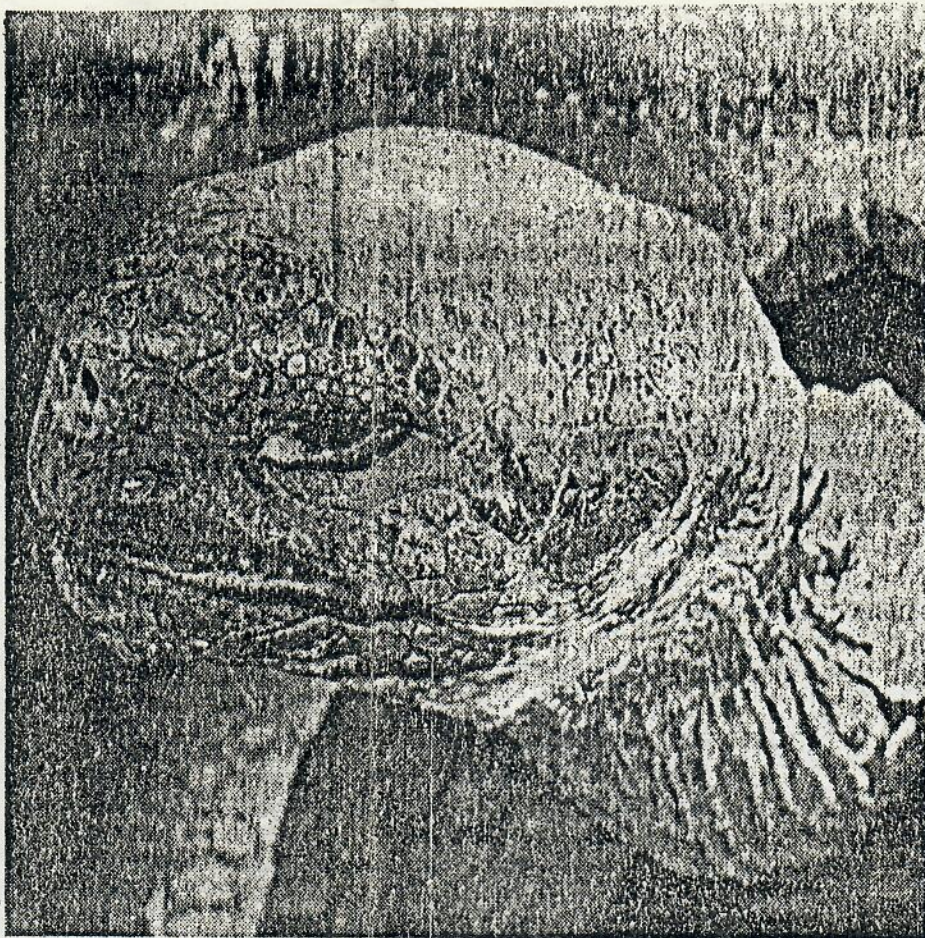
The two turtle steak importers in Hawaii are getting their steaks from Mariculture, Ltd.

NOW ENTER the conflicting claims:

Mariculture Ltd. promotes its business heavily by claiming that its operation, an investment it places more than \$3 million, is going to save the green sea turtle from extinction.

Mariculture Ltd. says it will save the creature by raising it domestically, supplying the world with significant amounts of additional protein. The great supply of turtles will at the same time guarantee that the species will survive.

There are problems with these claims, according to George Balazs, turtle scientist at the Hawaii Institute of Marine



Advertiser photo

The green sea turtle—loophole may threaten existence.

Biology. Other authorities back Balazs up.

For one, they note that Mariculture Ltd. is not able at this time to breed the turtles in captivity on the scale necessary for commercial operations.

In fact, they said employees at Grand Cayman have to go out into the wild and take eggs from nature—more than 50,000 eggs per year.

BALAZS IS contradicted by Gary Gerberg, 31, a North Shore resident who said he is a marine biologist. Gerberg is the younger colleague of Henry Bush, a

resident at the Ilikai Hotel who said he is a lifelong explorer, conservationist and aviation expert.

Bush and Gerberg have imported about 1,200 pounds of green turtle steaks into Hawaii, and anticipate bringing in another couple thousand pounds this year, Bush said.

Gerberg said Mariculture Ltd. is not dependent on wild eggs to stay in business. "Chelonia mydas (scientific name of the green turtle) is being farmed successfully and the species replenished as well. We need many more farms all over the world," he said.

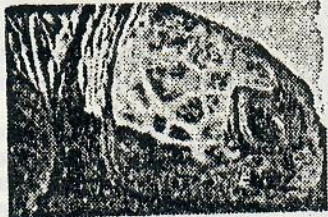
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Green Turtle 'loophole'

Several points in Bruce Benson's article "Loophole Puts Sea Turtle Into The Frying Pan" (9/18) seem to need clarification if the general public is not to become further confused with what is already a complex issue.

Division of Fish and Game Regulation 36 (relating to the protection of marine turtles), which became law on May 30, 1974, provides full protection for the Hawksbill and the Leatherback sea turtle. Both of these animals are already designated as "endangered species" by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The Green, which is considered to be "depleted", is the only other kind of sea turtle found in Hawaiian waters. Under the new regulation it is illegal for products from this animal to



be used for commercial purposes. Green turtles may be captured for home consumption but only if they measure 36 inches or more in shell length and a permit has first been obtained. The law provides for two exceptions to the ban on selling and herein lies the loophole which has seriously weakened if not completely destroyed the protective value.

In order to prevent economic hardship, a provision was included that allows restaurants and fishermen to

sell any existing supply of Green turtle meat that was acquired prior to the regulation's effective date. This supply can only be sold under permit and monthly reports must be filed indicating the amount of turtle remaining in stock. Over a period of time the supply on hand would, theoretically, become exhausted and sales would cease.

Unfortunately, representatives of the foreign commercial turtle farm, Mariculture, Ltd., have seen fit to use this provision for their own personal gain. The State Attorney General's Office has been informed that turtle products now being marketed by Mariculture, Ltd. are the result of eggs that were removed from natural nesting beaches prior to the regulation's effective date and, therefore, should be considered as legal for sale. Incredibly enough, the Attorney General has gone along with this interpretation which runs counter to the primary intent and purpose of the law.

The second exception provided in the regulation is that the offspring of captive Green turtles may be used for commercial purposes. The products of Mariculture Ltd. do not qualify under this provision and, in fact, it will be a number of years before even a small portion of their animals can meet this provision. The vast majority of the farm's stock is derived from the wild and the only successes in captive breeding have involved a small number of animals that were removed from natural breeding grounds as mature adults. The company has conducted an extensive promotional campaign emphasizing the conservation value of their ac-

clarified

tivities; however, little if any scientific data has been offered to support their claims.

Presently, a good deal of information has been compiled by sea turtle biologists which suggests that the operation represents an adverse factor to the survival of the Green turtle. Several attempts have been made by the company to legally market their products in California and Illinois; however, both of these states continue to ban all Green turtle products.

In Bruce Benson's article, Hawaii Deputy Attorney General Russell Fukumoto is attributed with saying that the reasoning behind the provision that allows the sale of offspring of captive turtles was "to ensure that turtle farming could stay in business." This statement is not only incorrect but it serves to demonstrate that the Attorney General's Office is completely unaware of the true status of turtle farming. The provision was included so that possible future turtle farms that are founded on a sound biological basis would be able to market their products.

I can see little reason why one of our State's hard won conservation measures should be compromised and exploited. It would seem to be in the best interests of both the people of Hawaii and the world's vanishing sea turtles if the Attorney General's Office would cooperate with the Division of Fish and Game in fulfilling the intent and spirit of our newly enacted regulation.

GEORGE H. BALAZS
Junior Marine Biologist, UH

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Turtle 'Farmer' Explain

By Keith Haugen
Star-Bulletin Writer

Henry Bush believes that if farmers were not raising fowl domestically as a food supply, wild game birds would soon become extinct.

And it is this logic that he applies to the controversy over selling turtle meat.

If enough turtle meat is made available from

"farms," there will be no reason for anyone to kill turtles in the wild, he says.

Bush, who has come under fire for selling the meat of an endangered species — the green sea turtle — here in the Islands, said the activities of the firm he represents actually offer "new hope for the green sea turtle."

Bush quotes at great length from leading conservationists and scien-

tists who advocate farming as a way to preserve the wild sea turtle.

"IF THE sea turtle is to survive, it must be farmed," said Jacques Yves-Cousteau, in one of his famous sea exploration films.

And Archie Carr, another authority, is quoted by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources as saying there is no reason why the turtle should not become a semi-domesticated meat animal.

"Successful evolution of such culture would not only extend the means of taking food from the sea, but would quickly take the pressure off the wild sea turtle populations, and thus help save the species for the distant future," Carr said.

GEORGE H. Balazs, a marine biologist at the University of Hawaii who championed the cause for conservation of the green sea turtle in Hawaii, does not agree.

He said there is little scientific data to support the claims of Bush and Mariculture Ltd., the company Bush represents.

Balazs feels that allowing Mariculture to sell turtle meat to Hawaii stores and restaurants is compromising and exploiting the State's conservation measures.

Although the State's regulation on commercial

use of the turtles generally bans the sale of such turtles, there is an exception allowing that the offspring of captive green turtles may be used for commercial purposes.

And it is the origin of turtles being sold here that seems to muddy the water.

MARICULTURE, which operates a farm in the Cayman Islands in the British West Indies, is raising more than 300,000 green sea turtles for sale throughout the world.

According to Bush, these turtles were all hatched at the farm.

Although some were hatched from eggs laid in captivity, others came from eggs collected from the wild.

Some scientists and conservationists say this has a detrimental effect on survival of the species in the wild.

But Bush said the eggs taken from the wild were "endangered" eggs — taken from areas where they would have been washed out by high tides, eaten by predators or on volcanic beaches where they had little or no chance of ever hatching.

He said Mariculture has the proper government permits whenever such a harvesting of eggs from the wild is done.

is His Side

Eventually, he said, the company hopes to raise all its turtles from eggs laid in captivity.

BUSH NOW sells to six restaurants in Honolulu and is negotiating with more than two dozen others. He said he is trying to establish a market here, even though he can't supply too much at present.

He started supplying Island restaurants last November, he said, and is air freighting the high-protein meat to Hawaii in 500-pound lots.

One customer, a Waikiki restaurant, buys the choice turtle meat cutlets in 100-pound lots — a supply that lasts about a month, Bush said.

Gary Gerberg, a marine biologist working with Bush, said the company eventually hopes to set up a farming operation here in Hawaii.

He said it would be a "natural" industry for the Islands and would be done with the full awareness and cooperation of local government.

GERBERG also believes that it is a good way to help reduce the killing of turtles in the wild.

He said one acre of water, five feet deep, can produce 200,000 pounds of

turtle meat per year in farming operation.

This compares with only 800 pounds of beef that can be produced on an acre of land in ranching operation.

Both Bush and Gerberg are quick to point out that the percentage of protein is much higher in turtle meat than in either beef or chicken and that the fat content and calories are considerably lower.

Words "out of context"

Turtle farming not favored

By BRUCE BENSON
Advertiser Science Writer

An eminent Florida authority on sea turtles, portrayed by two importers of green sea turtle meat in Hawaii as one who supports turtle farming, says in fact that he is opposed to the venture.

Dr. Archie Carr of the University of Florida

made his opposition known in response to an Advertiser query for his position on turtle farming and sales.

The turtle farm debate has escalated in Hawaii in recent months since Henry Bush and Gary Gerberg began importing frozen turtle steaks to Hawaii restaurants.

BUSH APPROACHED State Deputy Atty. Gen. Russell Fukumoto and State Fish and Game Department chief Michio Takata and got a permit to bring the steaks in, despite a recent ban on commercial turtle sales in the Islands.

The turtle population is depleted here.

Fukumoto said Bush got the permit because of a clause in the turtle regulation allowing the sale of turtles caught before it took effect.

Bush argued that turtles raised at Mariculture Ltd's turtle farm in the Caribbean were in captivity before the effective regulation date in Hawaii. Fukumoto agreed.

FUKUMOTO SAID Thursday his office is

looking into the situation again to decide whether the regulation means that turtle steaks cannot be imported into the State.

Said Dr. Carr, "The comments of mine quoted Sept. 24 are grossly out of context. They represent an old view of mine on the general subject of turtle farming and do not, as the juxtaposition is clearly intended to suggest, endorse or even refer to Mariculture Ltd.

"Further neglect of the context of the quoted remark is failure to refer to my often-published opinion that international commerce is the most important factor in the present alarming decline of the green turtle."

CARR CONTINUED, "Heavily capitalized, monopolistic turtle farms and world trade exacerbate the survival predicament of the green turtle by stimulating markets, raising demand and increasing hunting and poaching pressure everywhere."

A local turtle expert, George Balazs, has complained that one problem in allowing the Bush-Gerberg business to continue is that restaurants can stock Mariculture steaks, then supplement their

inventory with locally caught turtles, claiming the over-all supply came from Mariculture Ltd.

One restaurant on Maui, Balazs said, has reported a frozen turtle steak inventory of nearly 4,000 pounds. Balazs has questioned whether such an inventory exists.

A STATE FISH and Game official in Honolulu said his office is looking into the matter.

Carr also sent a letter he wrote late last year to Irvin S. Naylor, president of Mariculture Ltd., in which Carr said he would have to be "dull-witted" to encourage Naylor's kind of turtle farming.

Naylor had written Carr to ask his support in Mariculture's efforts to have California import its frozen turtle steaks, an effort that failed.

Carr said, "I believe that if you will take another look at a recent advertising leaflet of yours urging people to hang your prepared green turtle shells on their walls, you will see why Mariculture's expanding program makes me uneasy and will perhaps agree that I would be dull-witted to encourage California to help the spread of a disastrous vogue by opening its borders to the importation of green turtle products."