

Marine Turtle Newsletter

Report from Oroluk

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Oroluk is a low coral atoll in the Caroline Islands in the mid-Pacific region. It is located about 1600 km ESE of Guam and about 300 km east from Pohnpei Island. This small island (18 hectares) historically has had large numbers of nesting green turtles, and Pritchard (1977) felt Oroluk was the most important nesting ground in the state. From June through July 1985 and May through August 1986 turtles were tagged and their activities watched.

The arrival of turtle project personnel on Oroluk in May 1986 was a sad day for them. The residents of the island (7 people) killed three female turtles and cooked turtle eggs to take with them on the field trip ship back to Pohnpei. Project staff also found that two turtles tagged in May 1985 were eaten in August of the same year.

During the 1986 period, some preliminary work was done to protect two nests with wire cages and to look at hatching success. Humerus bones were collected, and forwarded to Dr. George Balazs of US National Marine Fisheries Service in Honolulu.

So far, one turtle tagged during the project has been seen elsewhere. A 99 cm female was tagged while nesting on Oroluk 2 June 1986 and laid 72 eggs. The turtle was captured alive in Nan-Way Bay in Taiwan on 18 April 1987.

It should be noted that for 1985 observations, turtle nesting averaged 2.3 nests/month, and in 1986, 3.4 nests/month were seen. This is considerably fewer than the 9-15 nests *per night* reported by Pritchard (1977). We do not know if the current nesting pattern has two peaks in December-January and June-July as has been reported. Nesting (maybe some false crawls) is reported by Oroluk residents all year round.

By law, FSM citizens are allowed to take green turtles greater than 34 inches except during June-August and December-January, but commercial sales are illegal. The impact on the turtles by the residents of Oroluk is certainly great. Changing technology has also resulted in making catching turtles easier (McCoy 1974, 1981). Other people (from Truk and Pohnpei, for example) now have boats which can easily go to Oroluk to fish and possibly take turtles and turtle eggs. There have also been reports of dynamite fishing off the atoll reefs.

At the end of the 1986 project, workers made several recommendations to Pohnpei State government about the turtles of Oroluk. The sandy beach facing the ocean should be left out for

turtle nesting ground and houses and pig pens moved inland. Pigs and dogs should be kept in fences or tied up. A proposal is being made to make Oroluk a sanctuary for wildlife, but state finances are very limited.

Funding for the turtle tagging project has been irregular. The past two years the project has been funded by Pohnpei Economic Development Authority, Pohnpei Marine Resources Division, a private grant from Ms. Donna Matson (Western Instructional Television, Los Angeles), and organized by Teresa Herring, a US Peace Corps volunteer. While a proposal to establish monitoring has been made, no funding has been granted for 1987. Attempts are also being made to make Oroluk a marine sanctuary (including seabirds and turtles). Project workers are continuing to seek sources of funding for the project, as well as for educational materials which can be used for turtle conservation education.

Table 1.

	June '85	July '85
Turtles Tagged	2	2
Tagged Turtle Nests	1	2
Tagged False Crawls	2	

Table 2.

	April '86	May '86	June '86	July '86	August '86
Turtles Tagged	1	5	3	2	0
Tagged Turtle Nests	0	2	8	2	1
Tagged False Crawls	1	4	1	3	0

McCoy, M. A. 1974 Man and turtle in the central Carolines. *Micronesica* 10 (2)

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Pritchard, P. C. 1977 *Marine Turtles of Micronesia* San Francisco; *Chelonia* Press