

# Helping Hands: The Rescue of Kauila

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*The spirit of  
Kauila lives on at  
Punalu'u.*

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*29K JPEG  
Photo courtesy G. H. Balazs*

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This is a story about a Hawaiian hawksbill turtle that lives in the same place as Kauila, the legendary turtle that protects Hawaiian children. Of course we don't know if this turtle was actually Kauila, but you never know. See what you think.

George Balazs is a sea turtle researcher who works for the U. S. National Marine Fisheries Service in Honolulu, Hawaii. Not only is he *the* world's expert on Hawaiian green sea turtles, but he knows a thing or two about Hawaiian hawksbills as well.

Hawaiian hawksbills are an Endangered Species and really rare. The Hawaiian word for hawksbill is "honu'ea" (HO noo AY ah). In any one breeding season there are only about two dozen nesting honu'ea in the entire Hawaiian island chain.

On November 16th, 1999, George visited Punalu'u on the Big Island of Hawaii to conduct a day-and-a-night turtle "sampling" with the "helping hands" of the students from the University of Hawaii Hilo Marine Options programme.

It was there he met a special hawksbill.

George explains in his own words:

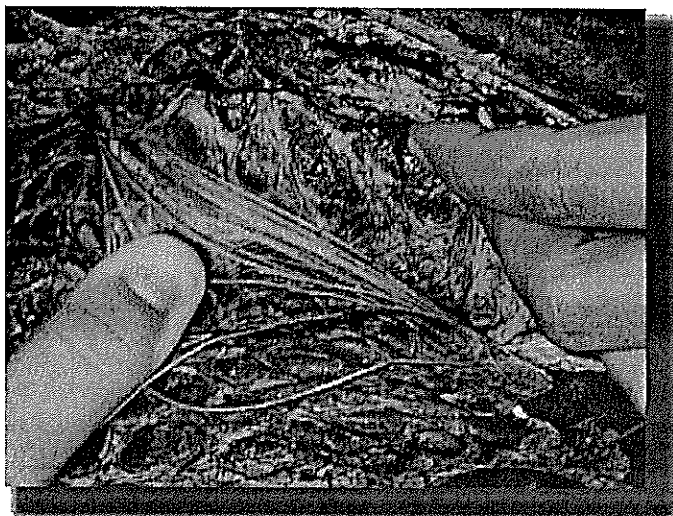
*"I was at Punalu'u for scheduled work. One of the trip's objectives was to try to locate a turtle in the pond by the gift stands. We had been hearing stories of a poor turtle stuck in the pond. Reports said it was tangled with fishing line, unable, or not knowing how to get out. I put 18 students around the pond watching and watching. Locals confirmed it was seen recently."*

All along George believed it was the more common green turtle that he and the students were searching

for.

George continues:

*"But no. In about one hour's time, the turtle appeared, to our shock--an adult female honu'ea. She had at least ten strands of monofilament fishing line around her left front flipper. Fortunately not cut deep. Yet."*




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***She had at least ten strands of monofilament fishing line around her left front flipper. Fortunately not cut deep. Yet.***

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*71K JPEG*  
Photo courtesy G. H. Balazs

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*"With the careful use of a Hawaiian turtle net, and some helping-hands in chilly water, we lifted her from the pond. Closer inspection confirmed there were about 10 loops of 20lb monofilament fishing line digging into her left front flipper.*

*"Otherwise, she seemed to be in ok condition. A tag on the flipper (94-D) had been placed there during a false nesting crawling August of 1998. She now carries double pit tags, so her identity will never be lost.*

*"Cut line off, kissed her, waved goodbye and said 'Aloha. God Bless.' She loved the feel of seawater return her face."*

Now, we believe that all Hawaiian green turtles (honu) have names. Each turtle receives a name as a hatchling as it bursts out of East Island sand. Its name is whispered over and over as the baby honu scrambles towards the sea. By the time it feels ocean The Name is forever.

A human can learn a honu's name if the turtle wishes to reveal it. The human must be patient, observing carefully what makes that turtle special. The proper rites must be observed.

There was really only one mystery left in the story of this hawksbill's rescue. How did the Hawaiian hawksbill tag identification 94-D become "Kauila"? We thought we knew but we wanted to be sure, so we wrote George and asked. In an email message he wrote:

*"I named the Hawksbill we rescued Kauila."*

Of course we know what this *really* means. The hawksbill was grateful for the kindnesses extended. She was patient, and observed carefully what made George special. The proper rites were observed.

Because she wished to do so, Kauila whispered her honourable name to him. Like the many other things

he does so well, George listened.

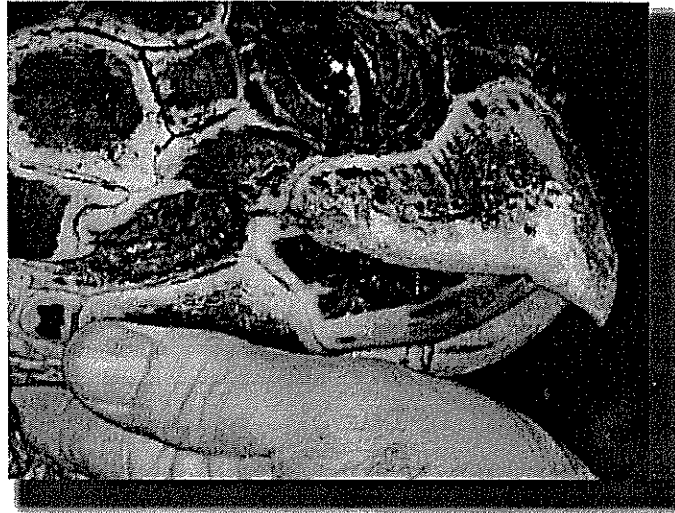
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*Because she wished  
to do so, Kauila  
whispered her  
honourable name  
to him. Like the  
many other things  
he does so well,  
George listened.*

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61K JPEG  
Photo courtesy G. H. Balazs

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George concluded this wonderful story with these remarks:

*"The story of her rescue, and the memories of the people involved, will endure for years, decades. And each time it's told it will inspire, we hope, others to work for this wonderful species whose survival is so precarious in the Hawaiian Islands, as it is elsewhere worldwide."*

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## The Rescue in Pictures



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*The capture by  
"helping hands",  
aided by laying  
out a net.*

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71K JPEG  
Photo courtesy G. H. Balazs

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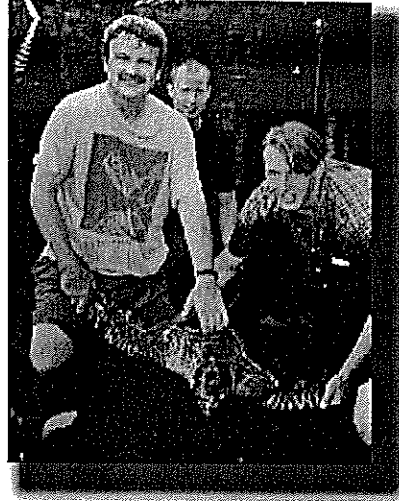
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*Victory at rescuing  
her--all smiles!*

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59K JPEG  
Photo courtesy G. H. Balazs

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*The "helping  
hands" assist  
George to bring  
her ashore--with  
care.*

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58K JPEG  
Photo courtesy G. H. Balazs

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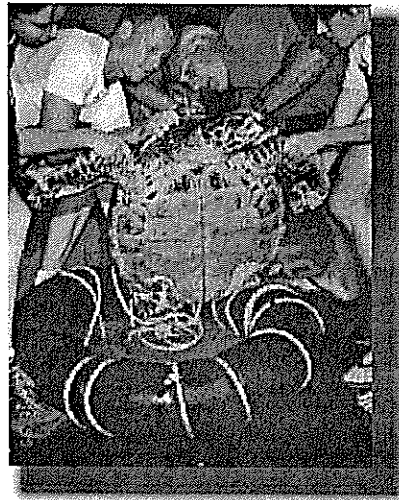
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*A more careful exam  
aided by "helping  
hands."*

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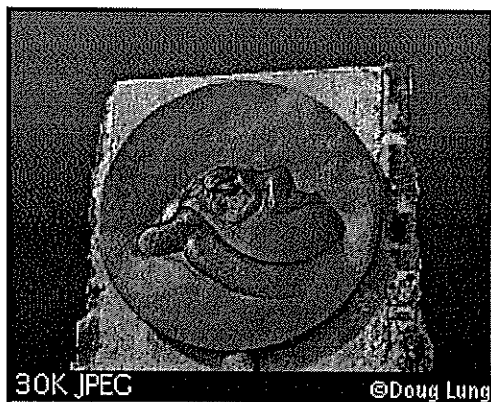
72K JPEG  
Photo courtesy G. H. Balazs

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# Kauila: Turtle Guardian of Children

## New Monument at Punalu'u Beach, Big Island, Hawaii



*This image of the Punalu'u Turtle Monument is based on a photo that was kindly sent by Doug Lung, who went to a lot of trouble to get it to us. For all your efforts, Doug, we say "Mahalo nui loa."*

On November 25, 1995, turtle lovers in Hawaii showed how important sea turtles are to them. They put up a stone monument at Punalu'u Beach on the Big Island of Hawaii. The monument honours Hawaii's sea turtles. It also honours the "Legend of Kauila."

According to Hawaiian legend, Kauila was a turtle with special power. She could turn herself into a young girl. The people of Ka'u loved Kauila because her spring gave them drinking water. They loved her even more because during the day, Kauila took human form and watched over their children as they played along the shoreline of the bay. She did this because she, too, liked to play.

Kauila kept the children safe.

Punalu'u Beach is a beautiful cove of black sand. There are many green sea turtles there. These turtles are tame and friendly. They often swim close to children playing and swimming in the water. This makes the children really happy.

*Turtle Trax* congratulates the people of Ka'u. They have done something wonderful for their beautiful and very special turtles.

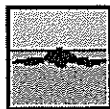
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[Helping Hands: The Rescue of Kauila](#)



[Kidz Korner](#)



[Table of Contents](#)

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