



Team members (l to r) Zach Hopson, Rebecca Wong, Christina Barth, Alima Catellacci, George Balazs, Arjun Clarry, and Marc Rice at White Rock. Not shown: Kulia Wooddell.

PHOTO BY CODY HOOVEN

Students Assist with *Honu* Health Assessments on Lānaʻi

By Marc Rice, Director
HPA Sea Turtle Research Program

The green turtle population along the north east coasts of the island of Lānaʻi appears very well. The 61 turtles captured and examined had the appearance of being well fed and healthy and there was not a single case of fibropapilloma tumor disease observed. After an absence of three years, George Balazs, leader of the Marine Turtle Research Program, NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, and I led a team of five students, an HPA alumnus, Arjun Clarry '95, and Cody Hooven, a NOAA staff member, to capture, measure, weigh, and conduct health assessments on Lānaʻi green turtles from October 12-19.

HPA student team members were Christina Barth '07, Alima Catellacci '07, Zachary Hopson '10, Rebecca Wong '09, and Kulia Wooddell '07, Mike Coelho '77, enforcement officer for the State of Hawaiʻi Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), joined the team during the weeklong expedition.

This trip followed up on our September 2002 visit when a similar student team captured and tagged 48 green turtles. The HPA/NOAA team worked the shallow fringing reef off White Rock and the near shore beach rock bench near Federation Camp. The team also initiated tagging in a new area two miles south of White Rock where small juvenile green turtles were found in significant numbers.

The capture work at White Rock required teams to snorkel 300 to 400 meters offshore to hand capture green turtles in areas where they rest and feed. Animals captured in this region normally ranged in size from 75 to

100 pounds. Hand-captured turtles were placed in rubber inner tubes and transported back to the beach for measuring and health assessment.

The team captured 61 turtles with 11 of those being recaptures (seven recaptured from the 2002 HPA/NOAA tagging trip). There were no cases of fibropapillomatosis observed during the entire trip. This includes all 61 turtles captured and more than 100 others not captured but observed. This is excellent news and further supports the idea that the general green turtle population might be developing immunity to the disease and/or conditions that might promote tumor development and growth are changing.

Similar reductions in the percent of tumored turtles also have been observed in the Palaau region on Molokaʻi.

Team members once again walked Polihua Beach to check for possible green turtle nesting. There was no indication that any nests were laid there this year although it seems to have been a significant nesting area in ancient times. Observations of the beach indicate that the sand might have a substantial amount of terrestrial sediment mixed in causing a more compact substrate making it difficult for turtles to nest successfully. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, green turtles nested along this famous beach where the goddess Pele is said to have feasted on turtles when she created the Hawaiian Islands.

After work, the team visited several historic sites on the island, including the Luahiwa petroglyph field, where a *honu* appears, and Kaunalu Bay. ■



Kulia Wooddell (right), Rebecca Wong, and Zach Hopson release a green turtle after assisting with its health assessment.

Editor's Note: "Na Honu Hawai'i—The Spirit Within" was this year's theme for the statewide Aloha Festivals. The Big Island Aloha Festivals kicked off its 30th Annual Paniolo Parade in Waimea on September 27.



The Paniolo Parade honored Marc Rice and Pi'i Laeha, loko i'a manager at Mauna Lani Bay Hotel & Bungalows, as "Ambassadors of Aloha" for their work with Honu on the Big Island. George Balazs and his wife Linda also were honored for his 35 years of work with Honu during the September 17 Aloha Festivals Floral Parade in Waikiki. ■