

# The Maui News

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## Rare turtles spotted on Kihei roads

### Motorists urged to watch for endangered hawksbills

By TIMOTHY HURLEY  
Staff Writer

MAALAEA — A rare visitor to the shores of Maalaea Bay hasn't been quite so rare in the last month, posing a potential hazard to motorists who travel North Kihei Road at night.

Motorists are being urged to use caution following at least four sightings of the hawksbill sea turtle, a creature listed on the federal endangered species list.

Wildlife officials say they don't want a repeat of last year's North Kihei Road incident in which a large, egg-bearing hawksbill female was struck and killed.

"It can be as hazardous to the turtle as it is to the driver," warned Katherine Smith, manager of the Kealia Pond National Wildlife Refuge.

Smith said she's so concerned that she's considering lobbying for the installation of roadside "turtle crossing" signs.

Last year's incident was especially tragic to wildlife biologists because it has been estimated that Hawaii is home to no more than two dozen hawksbill turtles. More than 170 eggs were recovered at the accident scene. The female turtle could have produced thousands of hatchlings over its lifetime.

The hawksbill nesting season starts in August and continues through November. The turtles come ashore at night to bury their eggs before heading back out to sea by morning.

This year's first hawksbill sighting occurred Oct. 5, when a big female successfully crossed North Ki-

hei Road in an apparent search for nesting sites in the Kealia refuge. Police were called at 1:30 a.m., and a wildlife protection officer trucked the turtle to the beach and steered it out to sea. A nest wasn't found.

The second sighting occurred Oct. 25, when police were summoned to what was described as a turtle in the road. When officers arrived, they couldn't find the turtle.

A day later a diver walking on the beach found a 200- to 250-pound hawksbill with its flipper entangled in pickleweed grass. He freed the creature, set it in the ocean and watched it swim away.

Finally, on Monday morning, refuge biologist Mike Nishimoto discovered hawksbill tracks in the refuge makai of the road.

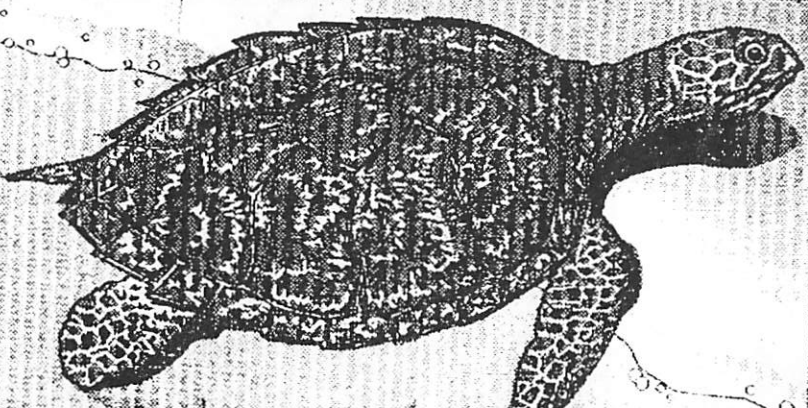
Officials are somewhat puzzled by all the hawksbill activity because the area isn't known to scientists as a traditional nesting site. The only historical data they have is the discovery of two nestings, one in 1991 and another in 1993.

Smith said one scenario is that the area, between Kihei and Maalaea, is a relatively new nesting site. Scientists believe turtles return to lay their eggs at the site they were hatched, and these turtles could be part of a new generation.

Another theory, Smith said, is that because the turtles follow the moonlight, they are being disoriented by the headlights where the road sits close to the ocean.

If you see a turtle, its nest or tracks, don't disturb them. Carefully note the location and report it to the state Division of Aquatic Resources or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

### Endangered Hawksbill Sea Turtle



The hawksbill sea turtle is considered by many authorities to be the most endangered of all marine turtles because of continuing international trade in tortoiseshell. The turtle grows up to 200 to 250 pounds and is generally smaller than the adult green sea turtle. The two species look alike, except in the head. While the green sea turtle has a blunt head, the hawksbill's is elongated like the beak of a hawk.

**Nesting season:** The hawksbill nesting season starts in August and continues through November. The turtles come ashore at night to bury their eggs before heading back out to the sea by morning.

**Sightings:** If you see a turtle, its nest or tracks, don't disturb them. Carefully note the location and report it to the state Division of Aquatic Resources or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at 243-5294.

Art source: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service / A. Kerstin, Jr.

The Maui News / R.D. DYE graphic

Smith said she's also interested in historical data on the shore activity of turtles. If you've seen a hawksbill, call Smith at 875-1582.