

HPA/NOAA: A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIVE MARINE TURTLE PROGRAM SPANNING TWENTY NINE YEARS

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In 1987, students from the Hawai'i Preparatory Academy (HPA) joined George Balazs of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) at Kiholo Bay on Hawai'i Island for the inaugural trip to ocean-capture, measure, and tag green turtles (honu). This trip was the launch of a very successful cooperative relationship between a secondary educational institution and a formal government agency that has spanned 29 years with positive impacts on the honu and people in Hawai'i and around the Pacific.

The work has been conducted primarily on the west coast of Hawai'i Island with approximately 2200 HPA students participating. There have been 249 tagging trips on the Island with over 3900 honu captured and released. In addition to flipper tagging, numerous ARGOS satellite tags and time-depth recorders have been deployed. Other ocean-capture tagging events have occurred on the other Hawaiian Islands. HPA students and teachers have volunteered to educate the public at community events. Additionally, HPA has run a turtle stranding rescue program for the west side of Hawai'i Island for over 15 years, assisting sick or injured turtles and collecting dead turtles for necropsy by NOAA scientists.

In addition to efforts in the State of Hawai'i, the program has worked internationally, including New Caledonia, Japan, Rose Atoll, Midway Atoll, etc. During these trips, HPA students and educators have assisted NOAA scientists and cooperating research organizations in the deployment of over 300 satellite tags on juvenile and sub-adult sea turtles. Thirteen HPA students have completed independent projects and presented them at annual International Sea Turtle Symposia.

The students of HPA have benefited by participating in applied science in action with a number of experts from around the world. The scientific results coming from the HPA/NOAA program have resulted in 75 publications and reports and a website highlighting program accomplishments (www.hpa.edu/turtle).

The robust population return of the honu in the Hawaiian Islands can be partially attributed to the HPA/NOAA program and its efforts to enhance scientific knowledge about the honu. For many students, their career paths and subsequent contributions towards science and conservation have been influenced by their experiences working with Hawaiian sea turtles.

Why has this cooperative program continued to grow and thrive over the last three decades? People make partnerships and throughout the 29 years the program has involved two essential members, NOAA scientist George Balazs and HPA educator

and scientist Marc Rice. While these two leaders will accept little praise, their achievements towards sustaining the honu and educating the people of Hawai'i and the world are examples of effective cooperation that can be applied to any initiative. Both leaders have enlisted the support of their institutions, networked with researchers, stayed relevant and innovative in the area of technology, and recognized then harnessed the energy, enthusiasm and potential of student scientists. It is our belief that cooperative projects will be successful if they have appropriate needs, effective leaders, and support from their respective institutions and the community.