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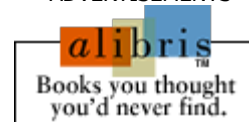
**EDITORIAL**

NO FRAMES

Tuesday,  
August 16, 2005



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bring order to  
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# Editorials

Tuesday, August 16, 2005

## OUR OPINION

# Police should bring order to beach popular with turtles

### THE ISSUE

Turtles basking at Laniakea Beach have drawn large numbers of tourists and created various problems.

THREATENED with becoming an endangered species, Hawaii's green sea turtles have made a dramatic recovery in recent decades, but their encouraging emergence has a down side. Hordes of tourists desiring to view the turtles at Laniakea Beach on Oahu's North Shore are causing traffic problems and some are harassing the stars of the show. Law-enforcement action is needed to bring order to the scene.

Before the state began protecting them in 1974 and the federal government listed them as a threatened species four years later, sea turtles were dwindling in number because of their destiny on the dinner table as steak, fritters or soup. Hawaiian waters are believed to be home for 35,000 mature green sea turtles, a nearly 600 percent increase from their years on the chef's list.

"To be dealing with the issue of crowding is certainly a lot more comfortable than it was in 1972 and 1973, when the same tourists that are now on the beach were ordering turtle steak for \$13.95," turtle expert George Balazs told the Star-Bulletin's Susan Essoyan. That doesn't mean authorities should blissfully look the other way.

Turtles have been drawn to the Laniakea Beach as a good place to sunbathe and dine on the seaweed in shallow waters. The attraction has caused a traffic jam on Kamehameha Highway, where visitors stream from illegally parked tour vans to glimpse the critters. Residents have complained about their homes being blocked and their beach being commercialized.

In addition, Marine Turtle Research Program, part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, has received numerous complaints about the turtles being harassed by tourists. The turtles are vegetarians but have begun to nip hands-on-lookers with their sharp beaks.

The research program, headed by Balazs, has hung banners and signs urging people not to "crowd, handle, feed or tease" the turtles, warning that violators may face fines. The program recently launched a "show turtles aloha" campaign.

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Balazs or a staff member has been staking out the beach daily, watching people's behavior and urging them to keep their distance. However, Denise Antolini, a professor of environmental law who lives in nearby Pupukea, said it would take "10 Georges" to assure acceptable conduct.

Antolini and other residents suggest formation of a task force to address ecological, traffic, safety and health issues to develop "a long-term solution that's beneficial to the turtles and the North Shore.

Such a strategy obviously is needed, although residents will have to accept that Mother Nature has turned their neighborhood into a tourist spot. Any task force should accept that reality and determine how to best handle the situation.

In the meantime, police should keep traffic flowing through the area and ticket, on a regular basis, vehicles that are illegally parked. If tour companies begin accepting parking tickets as the price of doing business, tow-aways may be appropriate.

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## HONOLULU STAR-BULLETIN

**Dennis Francis**, Publisher      **Lucy Young-Oda**, Assistant Editor  
(808) 529-4762  
[lyoungoda@starbulletin.com](mailto:lyoungoda@starbulletin.com)

**Frank Bridgewater**, Editor      **Michael Rovner**, Assistant Editor  
(808) 529-4791                      (808) 529-4768  
[fbridgewater@starbulletin.com](mailto:fbridgewater@starbulletin.com)      [mrovner@starbulletin.com](mailto:mrovner@starbulletin.com)

**Mary Poole**, Editorial Page Editor  
(808) 529-4748; [mpoole@starbulletin.com](mailto:mpoole@starbulletin.com)

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