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Gawk This Way

Every time a honu is ashore, humans gather to watch. What would happen if they turned the tables?

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PHOTO BY LINNY MORRIS

I awoke to strange, green murmurings.

"It's such a rare chance to see an animal in its natural habitat," the sea turtle whispered to another, who nodded approvingly. "It's a small female."

"Why is she all sprawled out like that?" asks another turtle, this one with a flat, Midwestern accent. I peer at her with one eye open. She's wearing a pair of tan capris that do simply nothing for her shape. "Is that human okay?" she demands. "Do we need to move her? Shouldn't we get her back upright?"

"Shush!" corrects a reptilian volunteer, clad in a safety-orange Save the Humans vest. "She's fine. This species crawls up onto queen-size, padded things when they want to rest. She's just napping."

Hey, buddy, I'm basking.

A visiting Japanese turtle boldly crouches near me, flashes a peace sign, and then scoots off.

"Stay behind the line, please," chides the volunteer. "Do not feed her, even her natural foods. If she learns to eat yogurt from you, she'll lose her fear of all turtles wielding Dannon cartons." The volunteer helpfully plucks an ABC bag off the carpet. "We don't want her to choke on this."

Clearly, this nap is going nowhere, so I sigh, and drop my feet to the ground.

Flashbulbs pop.

"She's moving, mama! Look!" A small crowd of turtles follows me into the kitchen.

"Adult humans subsist on coffee," proclaims a turtle in a Kona Brewing tee-shirt. He is reading from a xeroxed sheet. "They also graze on sushi, and English muffins. Look at her forage!"

Another turtle sidles up to me at the table, staring wistfully as I chew on my breakfast. She seems to be having some sort of spiritual moment. Well, commune away, honey.

I head to the bathroom, but by the time I get there, a van of turtles has already pulled up, driven by a chubby monk seal whose name tag reads STEVE. The turtles disgorge from the van, wobbling on the tile, and wait expectantly as I step into the shower.

"They prefer warm waters," notes the seal, who is just trashing my bathmat.

"How old is she?"

"No one knows. She looks about 80, but could live to 120. Supposedly, you can count the rings on her driver's license."

The turtles don their snorkels, and slip into the shower with me. God, they're everywhere! They bob in front of me as I reach for the shampoo, hover around me, and squeal riotously when I use the soap.

In the hallway, a turtle with an outrageous French accent hustles up to me, wielding a measuring tape. Then, ka-chunk—a metal tag has pierced my arm. Hey! I'm number 17! And what's this beeping electronic thing glued to my forehead?

"We keep careful count of the population and use a transmitter to track the migration," he explains. "Eet iz an incredible voyage of survival, from the gym, to the mall and back to Longs Drugs."

For a moment, I think he's talking to me. But then I realize there's a camera crew behind him, and he flippers away, in search of the next human.



ILLUSTRATION BY MATT MIGNANELLI