

Maui Book

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MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER



# kahakai

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Waters Edge

## Maui Girl returns

Turtle nesting again, a year later than expected

By **MELISSA TANJI**  
Staff Writer

Hawaii's green sea turtle expert felt "great excitement" when he learned this summer that "Maui Girl" had come to nest in Lahaina again.

Turtle fanciers had feared that Maui Girl had died because she failed to show up to dig nests last year, said George Balazs, leader of the Marine Turtle Research Program at the federal Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center on Oahu.

The green sea turtle, known in research reports as 5690 but to her fans as Maui Girl, since 2000 has been showing up consistently every other year to nest on Maui's west

side.

Balazs said researchers became worried when she didn't nest last year.

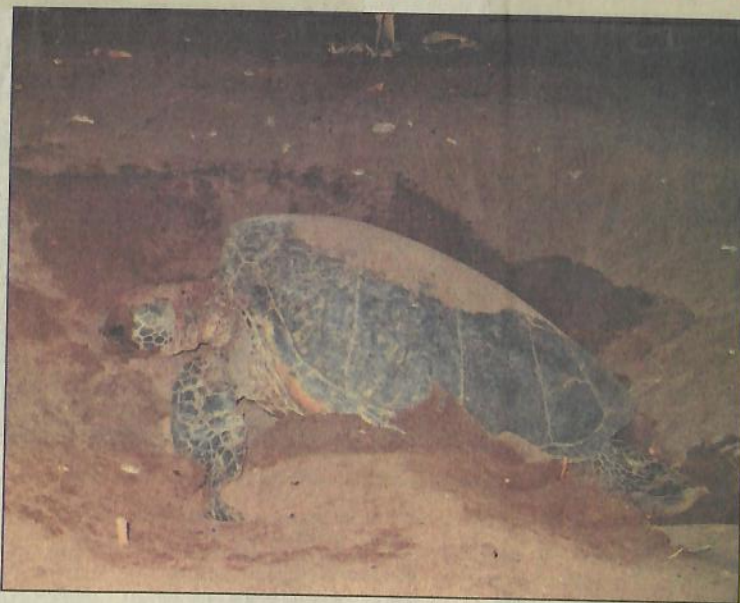
"So great excitement when it came apparent she had to do a three-year (nesting) cycle after all those years of two-year cycles," he said Monday.

"My excitement is she's alive, she's well, she's back," Balazs added. He said he's not going to worry about why she took three years to nest instead of her usual two.

Over the weekend, Maui Girl completed at least her second nest

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on the next page

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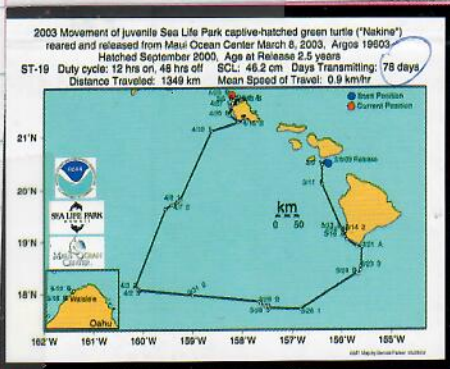
PETER BENNETT photo

**Maui Girl**, officially known as turtle 5690, lays her eggs early Sunday morning on a beach near Front Street in Lahaina.

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miles of travel, Turtle 22270 appears to have settled close to the shores of Mauna Lani. Do sea turtles have an internal navigation system that allows them to return to, or at least close to, familiar territory? Or, are these landings just coincidental? While it may take a few more juvenile turtle journeys to get more understanding, it seems the wonders of nature are just as incredible as the high-tech gadgets that allow us to learn about them.

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## Turtle

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this season in Lahaina near the 505 Front Street shopping center under the watchful eyes of turtle enthusiasts and sport divers Peter Bennett and his wife, Ursula Keuper-Bennett, of Mississauga, Ontario, who are here most every summer.

Bennett said that early Sunday morning, Maui Girl made her nest near the one she made two weeks ago at the same beach. Green sea turtles, which are federally listed as threatened, return several times to nest in one summer season.

"Every time it's always quite fascinating," Bennett said of the nesting process.

While it takes Maui Girl only around 15 minutes to lay her 100 or more eggs, the nesting process lasts hours, as she may go around and around the sandy shore area to find a suitable spot, Bennett said.

After finding a likely spot, Maui Girl first digs a "body pit." The pit may be 18 inches or deeper. Then she digs an egg chamber, also around 18 inches deep. The chamber may be shaped like an upside-down light bulb, narrow at the top and wider at the bottom, Ben-

nett said.

Then she covers the area up.

"It takes a while," said Bennett, who has watched the process many times. "She covers it up right up to the level of sand she starts to dig.

"It's very exhausting for a turtle," he added.

When she's done, she submerges herself back into the water again. If no one spots her, turtle watchers often detect the appearance of a new nest by the marks she leaves in the sand. Her habit of sticking pretty close to the stretch of beach from Lahaina Shores to Kame-