

SCHOOL REPORT

Hawaii Prep students conduct health assessment on

Hawaiian green sea turtles living off the east coast of Lanai appear to be healthy and well fed, according to Marc Rice, director of the Hawaii Preparatory Academy Sea Turtle Research Program.

Recently, Rice and George Balazs, leader of the Hawaiian Marine Turtle Research for the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Honolulu Laboratory, led a team of five HPA students to capture, measure, weigh, and conduct health assessments on Lanai turtles.

HPA student assistants were Rebecca Emory, Liz Evans, Brenden Lavender, Jill Quaintance, and Nick Quaintance.

HPA alumni graduates Arjun Clary and Mike Coelho, enforcement officer for the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), supported the group.

This was the first time since 1992 that the NMFS examined the Lanai turtles.

The team spent a week working the outer shallows near White Rock and at Federation Camp, located a few miles to the north.

"We swam out about 300-400 yards to capture turtles and then transported them back to shore on tubes for measuring, weighing and health assessment," said Rice.

"We captured 48 turtles with four of those being recaptures of turtles that were tagged in 1992.

"We saw only one case of fibropapilloma tumors, which was marvelous.

"The rate of infection was much higher during earlier expeditions."

Fibropapillomatosis is characterized by external and internal fibrous, non-cancerous tumors that

can cause blindness, difficulty breathing, and increased susceptibility to entanglement, parasites and other diseases.

Although Rice noted it is dangerous to declare any health trends based on this small sample, the results are encouraging.

Team members also walked the more than three-mile length of Polihua Beach to check for any signs of turtle nesting.

"This had been reported as an important nesting beach in historic times," said Rice.

"If it was indeed a nesting beach," he said.

"We found that it doesn't appear to be one now."

After work, the students visited several historic sites, including the Luahiwa petroglyph field and Kaunolu Bay in southwest Lanai.

The group also saw Kahikili Leap, the world-famous cliff diving site and location of the recent Red Bull World Championship Cliff Diving Competition.

HPA student participation in this study was made possible through a unique partnership with the NMFS.

Since 1987, students in the school's marine science program have worked with NMFS on a turtle research and monitoring project in West Hawaii.

The work has grown over the years in scope, magnitude, and importance to overall species conservation.

"Our students did a great job and the people on Lanai were extremely helpful and friendly," said Rice.

"It was a great trip and we will probably return for a follow up in about six months."

Lanai's Hawaiian green sea turtles





PHOTO BY MARC RICE

Learning how to "geocache" on Lanai, HPA students (left to right) Arjun Clary, Nick Quaintance, Brenden Lavender, and Jill Quaintance show their tools.



PHOTO BY MARC RICE

Members of the Lanai team captured, measured, tagged, and released two green turtles at Federation Camp in East Lanai. Pictured left to right: Jill Quaintance, Rebecca Emory, Brenden Lavender, George Balazs, Nick Quaintance, Arjun Clary, Marc Rice, and Liz Evans.