

MTRP Hilite for the week of January 10-14, 2005

A small but potentially very important short-term captive turtle experiment has been initiated in collaboration with Drs. Thierry Work (USGS), James Casey (Cornell University), and Robert Morris (Oahu clinical turtle veterinarian). Seven 6-month old green turtles, captive bred by Sea Life Park for research by the PIFSC, are being raised in a customized seawater tank at Kewalo Research Facility. The other 7 turtles are being reared in an equivalent manner on the West Coast of the Big Island by the Mauna Lani Resort. During the course of the study, estimated to be 6 months, blood and other samples will be periodically collected (harmless to the turtles) to compare antibody production and various physiological characteristics resulting from living in the two different seawater environments. Wild turtles in the vicinity of the Mauna Lani Resort are free of fibropapilloma tumor disease. In contrast, wild turtles around Oahu are often afflicted to varying degrees with this disease. Both Sea Life Park and the Mauna Lani Resort have a 25-year history of rearing small numbers of turtles for conservation, research, and educational outreach purposes. JIMAR Marine Turtle Biological Technician Bridget McBride will be in charge of the day-to-day care and feeding of the turtles. To streamline the process, automated turtle pellet feeders have been installed. In addition, with the helpful and expert assistance of ITS Russell Price and Ross Tasaka, an inexpensive remote camera will be placed near the tank to view the turtles' status, well-being, and feeding activities via the intranet when MTRP staff are not at Kewalo.

George Balazs recently met with Dr. Renato Lenzi, the new General Manager of Sea Life Park, to discuss ongoing cooperative research and educational outreach projects with sea turtles. Sea Life Park has been successfully breeding green turtles since 1976 with "pre-Act" display turtles (pre-US Endangered Species Act). Several hundred hatchlings are produced annually, most of which are immediately tagged with tiny PIFSC flipper tags and released into the sea. PIFSC research of sea turtles has been enhanced on numerous occasions as the result of this close 20-year scientific working relationship with Sea Life Park and their staff. Dr. Lenzi indicated that the new owners of the Park are committed to maintaining a quality sea turtle display facility with even greater emphasis on public education. He expressed appreciation to the PIFSC for scientific advice provided to the Park in the past, and looked forward to continuing a productive and enjoyable relationship.