

[student] spotlight

HPA Sea Turtle Research Program
Travels to Midway Island
Sophomore Meimei Nakahara Accompanies Group



Hawai'i Preparatory Academy Magazine > SUMMER 2010

Volume XXVIII ■ No. 2 ■ Issue No. 81 ■ SUMMER 2010

MA KE KULA

The Oceanic Society invited George Balazs, leader of the Marine Turtle Research Program, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA, and Marc Rice, director of HPA's Sea Turtle Research Program, to join them on one of their weeklong expeditions to Midway Atoll April 19-26, 2010. The purpose of Balazs' and Rice's trip was to see if it was logistically and institutionally feasible to mount a significant research expedition to Midway in the future.

Balazs and Rice last traveled to Midway about 10 years ago and while much has happened since then, very little has occurred in the way of formal research related to green turtles. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been diligent in recording sightings and even recorded several successful nests on Sand and Eastern Islands.

Naturalist Wayne Sentman and three other participants with a particular interest in sea turtles, including HPA sophomore, Meimei Nakahara, joined Balazs, Rice, and the Oceanic Society. The group worked together to monitor the basking behavior of the Sand Island turtles and carefully read tags on eight basking turtles that had been equipped with PIT tags during previous trips. One of the turtles, tagged in 1977 by a Coral Kings Dive Club diver, was seen nesting on East Island, French Frigate Shoals in 2009. In 1977, this female turtle measured 90 centimeters. The group read this animal's tag on April 18, 2010 while it was basking on Turtle Beach. She



TOP: Marc Rice, Meimei Nakahara, and other members of the Oceanic Society prepare to snorkel under the cargo pier on Sand Island. LEFT: Nakahara is surrounded by resident Laysan albatross and chicks on Eastern Island. RIGHT: Nakahara observes Earth Day by working with other volunteers to pull verbesina weeds on Midway.



measured about 100 centimeters in 2010, illustrating "how slowly mature-turtles grow, as this animal has potentially been a mature female for about 30 years," noted Rice.

"It was satisfying to see that there is a very healthy looking population of adult green turtles that commonly come out to bask at 'Turtle Beach' on Sand Island," said Rice.

During this time of year, about 1.3 million Laysan albatross are nesting and 50,000 black-footed albatross are raising their young on Midway. "It was an exciting time and we enjoyed the antics of these wonderful creatures as they tried to feed their chicks, interact with their mates, and land and take off...after all, they are called Gooney Birds!" said Rice. "In addition, we photographed

Bonin petrels, wedge-tailed shearwaters, red-tailed tropicbirds, masked and brown boobies, frigatebirds, white terns, and the very rare short-tailed albatross and Laysan duck. On top of the turtles and birds, we witnessed the birth of a rare Hawaiian monk seal on 'Turtle Beach!'" ■

For more information, visit:

<http://www.oceansociety.org/>

<http://www.pifsc.noaa.gov/>

<http://akepa.hpa.edu/%7Emrice/pwp/mrice/welcome.html>

<http://www.hpa.edu/turtle.html>

<http://naturefinder.blogspot.com/>