

Cook

Types of Marine Turtles

The Cook Islands has two marine turtles. The rare **Hawksbill Turtle** (*'Onu Tara*) feeds and breeds within the Cook Islands. The uncommon **Green Turtle** (*'Onu Kai*) spends most of its life feeding around Fiji and Vanuatu, and visits the Cook Islands once every few years to breed, usually during the summer.

◀ *Green Turtle*

David and Theresa Schrichte

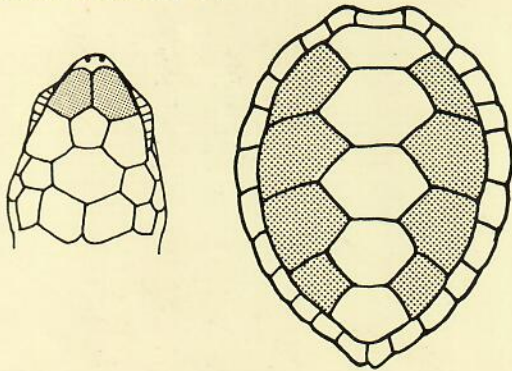


Green Turtle

'Onu Kai

Chelonia mydas

The shell scales do not overlap; at the rear of the shell, the edge-scales do not form sharp spines; the face has one pair of scales in front of the eyes.



The flippers make opposite marks in the sand; and the hatchlings are dark on top but white underneath.

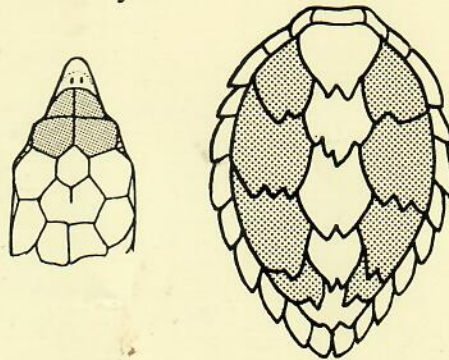


Hawksbill Turtle

'Onu Tara

Eretmochelys imbricata

The shell scales overlap; at the rear of the shell, the edge-scales each form a sharp spine; the face has two pairs of scales in front of the eyes.



The flippers make alternating marks on the sand; and the hatchlings are dark on top and underneath.



A Remarkable Journey

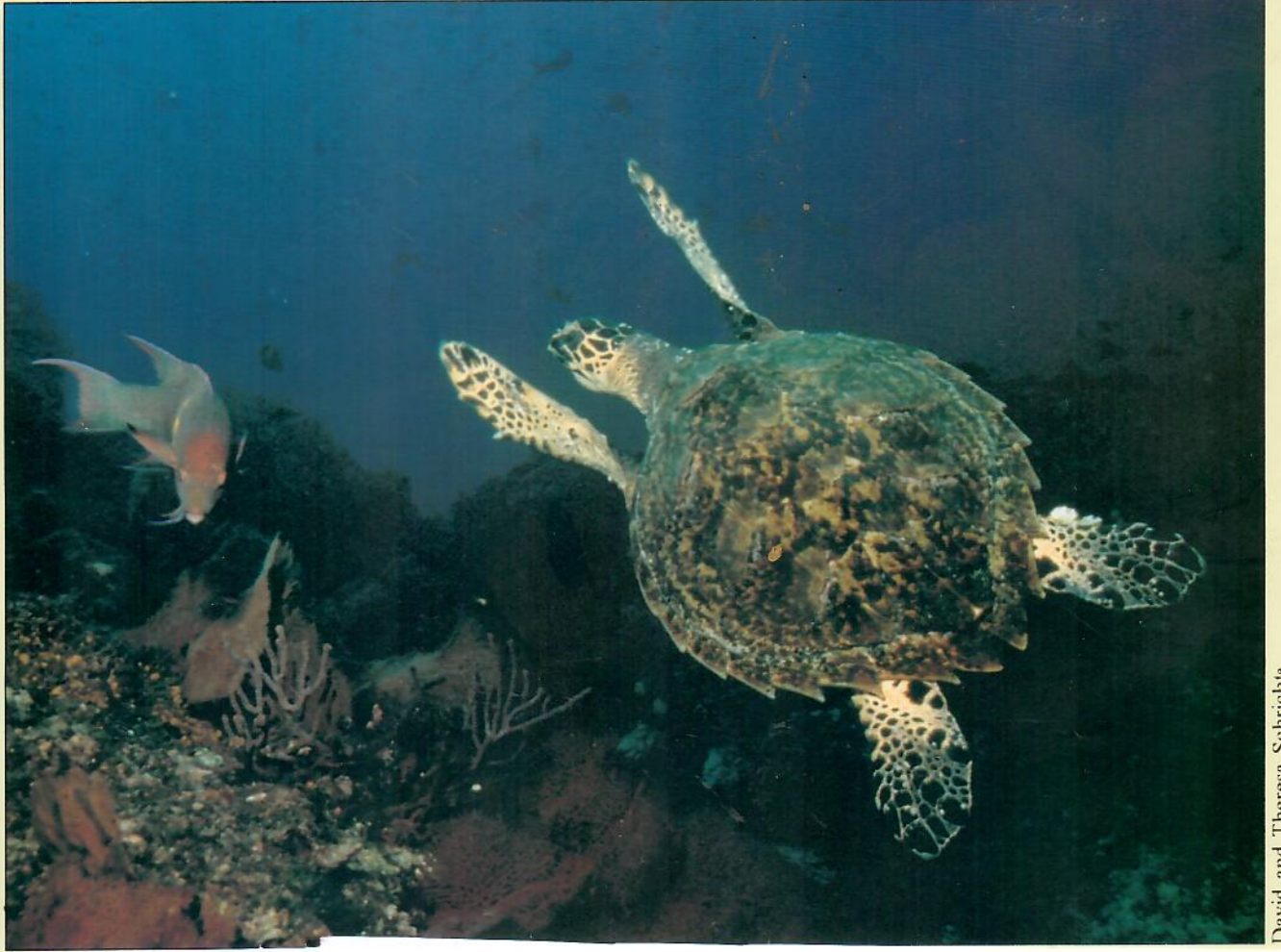
Imagine a newly hatched female turtle, hiding just beneath the surface of the sand on Palmerston, surrounded by her brothers and sisters - fifty to a hundred of them

has fallen she pushes through the sand and scuttles to the ocean. She plunges into the water and swims frantically away from the island for about a day, trying to avoid the attention of predatory sharks

Islands Marine



Turtles



David and Theresa Schrichte

After about twenty years of a good life, marred only by occasional attacks by sharks and fishermen, she becomes sexually mature and around September instinctively starts swimming eastward. She is using signs, which we don't understand, to find her way home to Palmerston. If she started her journey in Fiji it will take her two months to swim the 3,000 km to Palmerston - if she started in Vanuatu a further month of swimming is required to cover the extra 1,500 km.

In the waters around Palmerston she mates and under cover of darkness she struggles over the reef and awkwardly crawls above the high-tide mark to laboriously dig a few holes. If conditions are correct she lays 50 to 100 eggs in one of the holes. During the next couple of months, if she is not killed, she comes ashore several times, at about two-weekly intervals, to lay five or six batches of eggs. At the end of the breeding season she swims back to Fiji (or Vanuatu), and it takes at least a couple of years of feeding before she feels up to the strenuous journey again. By the time she is very old, at about 100 years, she may have made twenty trips to the Cook Islands to breed.

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Together we hope the Green Turtle will survive in the Cook Islands.

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Greenpeace/Thomas

Are Our Turtles Doomed?

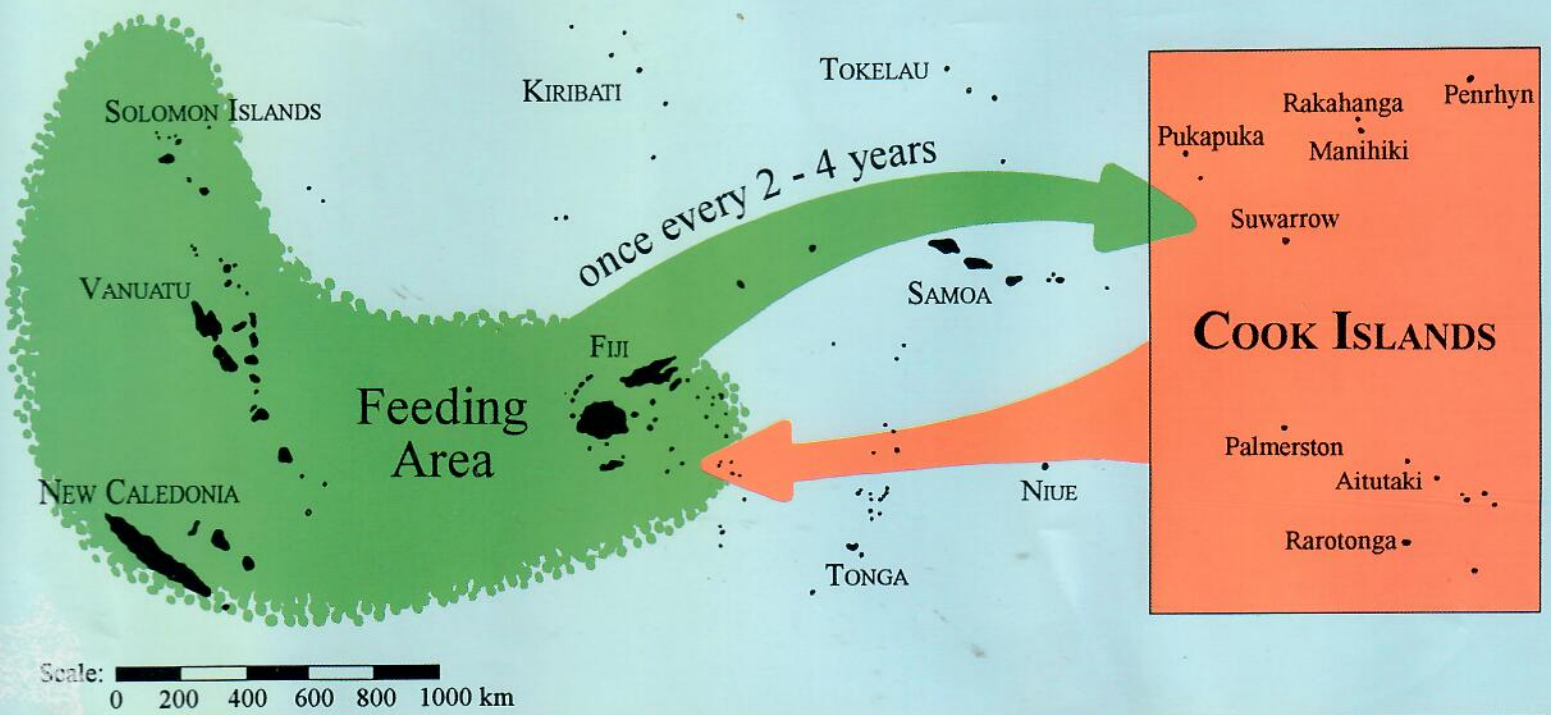
Throughout the Cook Islands breeding Green Turtles have dramatically declined in recent years. The reason for the decline is very simple: our turtles are killed by Fiji and Vanuatu fishermen while they are feeding in the western oceans, and when they manage to get home to breed, they are killed by Cook Islands fishermen.

Unfortunately, the saving of turtle colonies by raising and releasing hatchlings has not been successful, because it prevents the frantic swimming. A turtle that cannot recognize its birth-island cannot return to breed, and this knowledge is learnt during the frantic swim during the first day in the ocean. The only way to save the colony on an island is to let each female lay her five or six batches of eggs. Every female killed with immature eggs inside is a disaster for the colony.





Although many are killed, let our girl be one of the lucky ones. She then floats away in the great ocean currents, feeding on other small floating animals, hoping to avoid attention of larger predators. When she is three to five years old she abandons the open ocean and settles in the shallow waters around Fiji and Vanuatu, where her favourite seagrasses and seaweeds are plentiful. She has become just one more Cook Islander living overseas.



Baby Green Turtle ▶
▼ Green Turtle



Greenpeace/Noble