

HPA/NOAA SEA TURTLE RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION PROGRAM

BIG MOMMA Gets A Satellite Tag



[WHERE IS SHE NOW?](#)

In 1995, Big Momma was just a little green turtle hatchling at Sea Life Park, Oahu. After a short stay at the park, she was shipped to the [Dallas Zoo](#) where she was raised for the next 4 years. During that time she grew to a length of approximately 61 cm (straight carapace length) and a weight of 79 lbs. In 1999 Big Momma was returned to Hawaii and sent to Mauna Lani Bay Hotel's sea turtle facility. She was subsequently released into the wild during

turtle independence day at the MLBH on July 4, 1999. She swam away and wasn't seen again until March, 2007 when she was seen basking on the sand in Kaloko-Honokohau National Historical Park (KAHO). It isn't all that unusual to see basking turtles at KAHO, but this one was unusual because she seemed so large.

In May, 2008, park personnel were able to take a straight carapace measurement and read a tag. The SCL was 87 cm and it was noted that the tag (V727) belonged to the MLBH turtle released in 1999. The simple math shows a growth rate of about 2.5 cm year over the last 10 years, a much higher growth rate that we see in animals along the west coast of the Big Island these days. In addition, Big Momma seemed to be very robust (even fat some might say).

Where had Big Momma been all this time and what was she doing that allowed her to grow so much faster than all other green turtles in the area? In order to track her movements, she needed to be equipped with a ARGOS satellite tag. On June 7, George Balazs, Marc Rice and Cassandra trekked down to Kaloko-Honokohau National Historical Park in the remote chance that Big Momma might bask during the afternoon. As we were walking north along the beach in the park at about 1230 h, George spotted a large dark shape just coming out of the water in the area where Big Momma normally basked... What amazing good fortune! It was her. George claimed that he "texted" her in the morning inviting her to a basking date.... and she responded.

Regardless of why she came out, we were able to capture her and attach a satellite tag with the help of park service personnel Jon and Len (see above flash images). She was released at 1400 hours and is currently free and, hopefully transmitting signals of her location up to Argos satellites. The data will become available for mapping over the next few days and will be posted on this site. By the way, Big Momma topped the scales at 267 lbs!