



BO BLINSKI photo

A green sea turtle sighted off Wailea Beach on May 22 was suffering severe bloating — possibly from an infection — that wouldn't allow it to submerge. South Maui turtle volunteer Bo Blin-

ski took this photo when he examined the excessively buoyant turtle May 23, but couldn't persuade the turtle to come in for medical help until the next day.

Sea turtle's case of bad gas has a happy ending

6/2/06 A.L. THE MAUI NEWS

By HARRY EAGAR
Staff Writer

WAILEA — A green sea turtle suffered from gas so much that it couldn't dive down to lunch and then defied rescue for three days. Tourists were alarmed, but the tale had a happy ending.

"My body is extremely sore the last four days," says Bo Blinski, a sports teacher at the spa at the Grand Wailea Resort Hotel and veteran turtle volunteer, after a long and potentially dangerous struggle to get the turtle ashore.

The "excessively buoyant" turtle was spotted May 22 about 100 yards off the Wailea Marriott and reported to the Marine Turtle Research Program, which maintains a watch for stranded

turtles.

The problem was, this turtle — described by Blinski as good-sized but not exceptionally large (it was later weighed at 110 pounds) — declined to be stranded.

Blinski swam out and tried to shove and guide the turtle to shore. No dice.

Since 1990 the turtle program of the National Marine Fisheries Service's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center and its helpers have salvaged, treated, saved and successfully released back into the ocean more than 400 stranded sea turtles in the Hawaiian Islands.

Usually, it's just a matter of a couple

See **TURTLE**
on Page A5

'A turtle in distress is a sad circumstance, but it can also be an attractant to large predators.'

— George Balazs,
leader,
Marine Turtle
Research
Project

Turtle

Continued from Page A1

of strong backs lifting a turtle off the beach into a pickup truck for a trip to the airport and a quick flight to Oahu. The program doesn't even have a boat.

Throughout the day on May 23, even tourists could tell something was wrong with the turtle. It could dive but it couldn't stay down long.

Ka'au Abraham of the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary office in Kihei was checking on the turtle, which was sometimes difficult to track, and visitors to the resort were wondering why no one was helping the turtle.

Meanwhile, Maui turtle volunteers were wondering how to do that.

Blinski was concerned that a distressed turtle might be "shark bait or dangerous for a boat."

In Honolulu, George Balazs, leader of the Marine Turtle Research Program, was also wary about sending someone into the water, in case sharks might be prowling. An unconfirmed report said a shark was seen.

Blinski says he was "not really concerned" about sharks. Before making his next attempt, he surveyed the water carefully through binoculars.

"I've dealt with worse sharks on land than in the sea," he commented.

So he went out in his kayak and spent 40 minutes trying to corral the turtle.

Blinski knew he needed help. He's not a big guy, and he knew "there was no way I could lift it."

He recruited a beefier kayak guide, whom he knew only as Anthony, "a good guy," and they tried.

Still no success. So on Wednesday, May 24, they recruited an activity company Zodiac and its crew of two.

Even with all that help, it still took about an hour to haul the flailing and frantic turtle over the side.

Blinski realized the turtle was afraid of the kayak and the boat. So he had the Zodiac shut down its engine and steered the turtle to face away from the boat, where it couldn't see it.

Then he and Anthony backed the turtle up to the boat and with the crew hauling and them heaving, got it aboard.

By noon Wednesday, the turtle was on the way to a veterinarian on Oahu, Dr. Robert Morris. An X-ray revealed a gas-filled gastrointestinal tract.

Morris gave the turtle antibiotics and transferred it to a tank at Kewalo Basin, where it remains "excessively buoyant" but with a good prognosis.

All's well that ends well, Balazs says.

"The ocean is a place where things get bitten at times, that is, big things biting smaller things.

* "A turtle in distress is a sad circumstance, but it can also be an attractant to large predators. We balance all aspects — turtle's well-being versus human's well-being" before taking risks, he says.

"I was lucky enough to get people interested," says Blinski, who hopes the rescue will help educate people to the situation of the Hawaiian green sea turtles, which are listed as a threatened species.

■ Harry Eagar can be reached at heagar@mauinews.com.