

OCEAN WATCH



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HSA

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*Sea turtles are wonders to witness everywhere*

**T**his year I've already had the best Christmas present ever: a boost in appreciation of living on Oahu. For this gift I thank my visiting relatives from Portland and friends from Vancouver who couldn't wait to go snorkeling. They were at the door with masks and fins while I was still looking for my wet suit. (It's winter, for heaven's sake.)

And then we got in the water and saw the turtles, some large, some small. They didn't actually approach us, but neither were they fearful, and sometimes we had to maneuver to get out of a grazing turtle's way. Hawaii's honu, the Hawaiian word for green sea turtle, made each of my visitors' snorkeling experiences remarkable.

I'm so accustomed to seeing Hawaii's honu that I sometimes forget how lucky we are to have so many turtles swimming unafraid in island waters. Because Hawaii's green sea turtles are the only population in the world that routinely come out of the water to rest and sunbathe, residents and visitors also get to watch them sleep on some North Shore beaches.

At a state park in Queensland, Australia, people get to see sea turtles lay eggs, a miracle I witnessed during my last visit there. The park, called Mon Repos, supports the largest concentration of nesting marine turtles in the eastern Australian mainland and is also the South Pacific's most significant nesting population of the endangered loggerhead turtle.

You can imagine my excitement, then, when I learned that I could buy a ticket to watch a loggerhead lay her eggs. After a turtle crawled up the beach, dug a hole and started laying her eggs, a ranger biologist propped a small light behind the turtle. Another ranger then arranged us ticket holders in a wide circle he had drawn in the sand around the nest. In silence we shuffled clockwise so everyone got a chance to see the eggs drop. Sea turtles get trance-like while laying, and this one didn't seem to even see us. When she finished her life's grand mission, we

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**Turtle biologists measure a known loggerhead female as she lays her eggs in Mon Repos park in Queensland, Australia.**

# OCEAN

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backed off as instructed and watched the loggerhead return to the ocean.

This extraordinary education effort, appropriately called "Miracles on Mon Repos," by the Queensland government heavily promotes attendance by our only hope for the future of sea turtles and our oceans: schoolchildren. The kids in

my group were absolutely awestruck. Ticket proceeds support the program, turtle research and Mon Repos' inspiring education center.

Because most of our honu nest at remote French Frigate Shoals, it's not possible to watch them lay eggs. We have our own miracles, however, in that we can watch, swim and sunbathe with them. To help share Oahu's great gift of turtles, see the "Help the Honu" tab at [malamanahonu.org/index.asp](http://malamanahonu.org/index.asp).