

Balazs and Balazs (2015) Fall and Rise of the Hawaiian Honu: A 50-Year Witness to Cultural and Conservation Change. Hawaii Conservation Conference, Hilo.

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ABSTRACT 1-15: Fall and Rise of the Hawaiian Honu: A 50-Year Witness to Cultural and Conservation Change by George Balazs and Linda Balazs IUCN/SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group, Oceania Region, Honolulu, Hawai'i, USA.

Seven species of ocean turtles exist globally as descendants of ancient reptilian lineages that have adapted and survived for millions of years. Over the course of human history an array of relationships have developed with turtles, and especially marine turtles amongst coastal and island peoples such as in the Hawaiian Islands. Turtles are woven deeply into the cultural, traditional, and contemporary fabric of humanity with uses ranging from food to fortune telling, pets to funerary. In 2012 Hawaii's green turtles or honu (*Chelonia mydas*) were downlisted from Endangered to the category of Least Concern following a comprehensive assessment by the IUCN Marine Turtle Specialist Group (see <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/16285718/0>). Over the past 50 years Hawaii's honu have exhibited new behaviors and adaptations along with an increasing population and expansion into new habitats. These favorable changes have ranged from increases in terrestrial basking to feeding on new types of vegetation, to name a few as witnessed first hand by the authors. Even more beneficial changes and acclimations can be expected in the future, including shifts in nesting to adapt to climate change, as sea turtles have successfully done with resiliency for millennia. In light of their rise to abundance, green turtles in the Hawai'i constitute a unique experimental model to comprehensively understand the restoration dynamics of an increasing sea turtle population. Conservation practices in Hawai'i can serve as a real-life learning ground for people in other regions striving to save and sustainably use their own charismatic and culturally important sea turtle resources.