

Summer Summary--2004 (04/09/04)

Fewer turtles

The primary thing that stands out from the Summer of 2004 was the decline in the number of turtles we were seeing. Admittedly, we also made fewer dives both at Home Base and also Kuamo'o, but the population bust was apparent right off the bat.

It was echoed by George Balazs after his snorkel survey at Kuamo'o as well. "Is it just my impression or are there fewer turtles this year?" George asked as he dried off on the beach.

"Fewer turtles," we agreed. Fewer turtles at both sites!

Old friends we've known since the mid-90's and before remain missing. Most troubling are the ones that are crucial to our fibropapilloma study like [Kamaha'o](#).

Six are males and, well, males might not be back yet from their reproductive journey. We tell ourselves that [Zeus](#), [TAMU](#), Amu'ala, Pi'iwaiwai, Moe, and George will make it back safely. Except that doesn't quite ring true.

We've already logged seven females back from nesting and males should have arrived before them!

Uwapo, a daily feature on our reefs for years, made no appearance at all. Some areas that used to host resting turtles at our dive site are completely abandoned. Ghost towns of sorts.



In 1999, East House was under destruction but still had plenty of occupants.

[90K JPEG](#)



In 2004, the demolition of East House was complete, and it was usually abandoned.

[93K JPEG](#)

We have no idea why.

Wai? Who?!

The biggest news, even topping the return of 5690 to the Maui nesting scene, is a unique young turtle named "Wai?" (Hawaiian for "Who").

[Last week](#) we reported how, through astounding luck, Wai? reappeared at Kuamo'o for only the second time this summer, just when George Balazs happened to be accompanying us. George relieved Wai? of some skin barnacles that are now being put through DNA testing to determine Wai?'s pedigree.



We're confident that Wai? is the first known honubill.

[82K JPEG](#)

There's strong external evidence that Wai? is a hybrid, a cross between a Hawaiian green turtle and a hawksbill. We--and that includes George--fully expect that the DNA analysis will confirm our suspicions. If so, this will be the first known honu-hawksbill cross in Hawaii, or as George has already named it, the first honubill.

It will also allow us to remove the Question Mark after Wai?'s name.

5690, a/k/a Maui Girl

Turtle 5690 returned to Lahaina this summer to lay down seven nests by mid-August.

5690 in her egg-laying trance as she makes nest number 5 for 2004.

[72K JPEG](#)



There was reasonable expectation that she'd go for a record eight nests, and we spent several nights on the beach waiting for her eighth crawl, but nope.

We also were blessed to witness, first-hand, the emergence of hatchlings. It happened almost the way the books say--just a whole lot slower!



The hatchlings emerged slowly enough that they showed up on this 15 second exposure!

[57K JPEG](#)

Our warmest memory was sharing [the August 28th emergence](#) with George Balazs, who had suggested we check on the nest on a whim. It was at least two days too early, judging by previous nests, but when it comes to honu and George, things have a way of happening. Sure enough, teeny honu were poking their noses up, probably knowing this was a chance to meet George.

This nest was also special because [we saw 5690 lay those eggs](#) on the night and early morning of July 6-7th. We saw some of the hatchlings emerge, and we were still on Maui to see the nest excavated.

Skippy Hau excavates nest 5 in the Lahaina sunset, completing our first full cycle with a honu nest.

[67K JPEG](#)



We've never seen a nest come full circle before, so this was truly a bonus for us.

The other honu Mommas

While 5690 might not have broken her old nesting record, we broke one of our own this summer by reporting no fewer than *seven* 2004 nesting females safely returned from their nesting migration.

Each carried a mototool, white-painted engraving on the right rear of their carapaces. We were joyful to see that one of our oldest residents, [Tutu](#) was the first female back from our [ohana](#).



Ursula photographs [Tutu](#), who is sporting her latest mototool number 278.

[64K JPEG](#)

This makes six successful nesting migrations for Tutu, and six times she's returned Home safely. Along with [Nui](#), who we've also known since 1990, Tutu is our longest known resident.

We hope to see her again in Summer 2005.

Quality time with George Balazs

It's always wonderful having George Balazs over for a visit. George was so intrigued by events unfolding here that he even extended his stay so that he could snorkel one more evening to watch the honu here forage.

Quality time includes lots of talking story and what George likes to call "cogitation." This summer gave us all considerable

fodder upon which to cogitate.

George and Ursula cogitate late at night.

[65K JPEG](#)



We cogitated all over the place, from early morning to very late at night. We even cogitated at the Kahalui Power Plant while counting turtle heads.



George and Peter cogitate at the Kahalui Power Plant.

[63K JPEG](#)

We cogitated until our brains seized. Sea turtles are great reasons to cogitate.

The kayak

Never in our wildest dreams did we think we'd make so much use of our kayak. The learning we accomplished as a result of our time *on* the water is unprecedented as well. We finally started to find out more about the foraging of our [ohana](#), something we've pondered for years. When we took our first faltering lessons in kayak use from Mickey McAfee of [Kapalua Dive Company](#), we had no idea how much we'd come to like it, let alone the doors that it would open. [Mahalo nui loa](#), Mick!

From our kayak we witnessed famous Maui Turtle 5690 in the company of three males:

5690 and suitors, spotted from our kayak.

[75K JPEG](#)



We discovered that the kayak is extremely useful for identifying turtles. In several cases we sighted a turtle from the kayak before we ever saw them while diving. [Shredder](#), a female we've known since 1995, is shown here newly returned from nesting.

If you load the larger JPEG, you can almost make out the mototool number 493 on the right rear of her shell:



[Shredder](#) was first spotted from the kayak.

[101K JPEG](#)

In addition, the kayak has served as a "support vehicle" during snorkeling ventures. It helps "drag" the snorkeler about faster and also allows longer time in the water because the kayak can carry food and drink.

Just as important, the kayak has extended our time on the water to include night--a time we'd no longer consider for being *in* the water, not even for a microsecond.

The kayak means we're no longer afraid of the dark!

[49K JPEG](#)



We've even slept *in* the kayak! (Only when it was pulled up on the beach, however...)





The kayak as bed.

[31K JPEG](#)

2004 Zeus report

A huge disappointment for the summer was our failure to see [Zeus](#) for the second year in a row. We refuse to think anything bad has happened to the Big Guy, but we can't help worrying just a bit. Maybe next year.

Last thoughts

2004 was one hellcat roller coaster. The summer carried our emotions to lofty heights--pure joy at discovery--but we scraped the pits and then some this year. We caught malignant whiffs of people who lie and betray. We've experienced lies and betrayal before but never with such appalling duplicity to boot.

People who pose as "stewards of the sea" who turn out to be mere tour operators, and dishonest ones at that.

Meeting them marked the Depths of our Summer.

Still, there were also Terrific Times: seeing George, Skippy and Glynnis again--and [Mr. Sasaki](#). Such good hearts all.

Overall though, we're eager to leave Summer 2004 to the memory bin. It was an exhausting, demanding summer that saw far too much negative emotion, most of it the result of being unfortunate enough to meet the wrong people.

Your momma was right! Don't take any wooden nickels from strangers.

It's important to leave this summary on the bright side. We're grateful that we remain healthy and vow to work out hard in the gym for the next ten months so we can do this all again in Summer 2005.

Minus the 2004 "negatives".



Ursula and Peter at the excavation of 5690's nest 5.

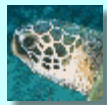
[85K JPEG](#)



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