



East Island, French Frigate Shoals, Hawaii. Photo courtesy G. H. Balazs

Turtle Trax



Lahaina, Maui: tracks of 5690 making her sixth nest in 2002.

A Page Devoted to Marine Turtles

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Big mysteries and little joys (August 3-9, 2008)

August 10th, 2008

Dedication

For the remainder of this summer, these blogs are dedicated to the memory of Rick Dalton, brother-in-law but more important, friend. Aloha nui loa Rick.

Change is hard—and so is unchange

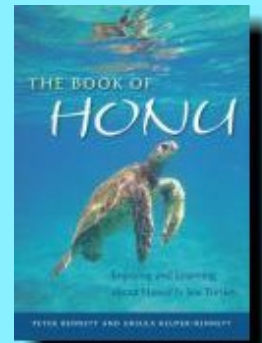
Before we get to this week's events, I want to make a quick comment on Turtle Trax itself.

To create this blog, I use WordPress, which for the most part is a pleasure. Last week I discovered that the TinyMCE Advanced plugin really does tame the visual editor to the point where I might, for the first time ever, abandon hand-coded HTML. There are quirks, but I'm getting used to them. If you have your own blog, then you owe it to yourself to try this combination.

Anyone who's read my early entries knows that I was ambitiously planning to revise the whole website to use CSS. (Can I just interject here that CSS suck?) The problem is that my long-cherished style for images employs drop-shadows.

CSS really sucks at doing drop-shadows of any sort, never mind the nice soft-edged ones I wanted. For a while I switched to a hard shadow, but I didn't like it. Finally, this week I decided that HTML tables aren't that wicked and if purists want

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to turn up their noses at the way I do things, fine. See if I care.

So I spent a good part of today drafting some macros to generate tables combined with a little CSS for my drop-shadow style images. They finally work, as you can see below. This is my style, and I'm sticking to it. Thanks to Matthijs Hollemans for Macro Expander. (Oh, and a special thanks to Internet expletive-deleted to Explorer for making my day more interesting.)

We return to Kuamo'o

Kuamo'o, our alternate dive site, is a fantastic dive, but it has its drawbacks. It's both shallow and sandy, so the least bit of wave action makes it murky. Last week provided the first prolonged period without a swell, so we headed there for a long-overdue survey and to collect the temperature logger we placed last summer.

Even after a couple of days of quiet waters, the visibility was still mediocre- but pretty good for Kuamo'o. As expected, we immediately began sighting turtles. Kuamo'o must concentrate at least twice number of honu we see at Reef 2 into a noticeably smaller area. We were prepared for that, but one of the first things we saw we were definitely not prepared for: Wai?, the honubill, was settled peacefully into a hollow in the huge coral formation that dominates Kuamo'o.



Wai?, nestled into the main reef of Kuamo'o, while a honu passes overhead and Ursula lurks in the background.

Click image to enlarge

[of Jose: a night atop Haleakala](#) (0)

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[November 2007](#) (3)

[October 2007](#) (4)

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RECENT COMMENTS:

[joe](#): i love turtles!!!

[Nancy](#): Aloha
Looked out from my lanai this morning and was met with surprise and happiness to see the...

[bruce drye](#): you guys are still doing great work. keep it up. I'm still inspired by your efforts.

[Charlayna](#): Hiroko Okuda- Was the turtle a Hawksbill? Did it have a jagged shell? Hawksbill sea turtle are not...

[Peter](#): Aloha
Marsha, Mahalo for

[Why Wai? is incredible](#)

Here's the thing. There is only one honubill that anyone knows about. In all of Hawaii, no one has ever reported another turtle like Wai?, ever. For us to discover her was like winning the lottery. [We first sighted her at Kuamo'o in 2004](#). Then, much to astonishment, we saw her again in 2006 —[at Reef 2!](#) Incredible enough, but even more so that she'd show up at [both sites in the same summer](#).

Now, Reef 2 is about 4.5 km (or 3 miles) from Kuamo'o. There are a lot of turtles between the two, most of them strangers we'll never see. Yet Wai? shows up at the only two places where we dive regularly! What are the odds? Ursula and I have an ongoing debate about whether this means we should buy—or avoid—lottery tickets.

Kuamo'o tumors

The honu at Kuamo'o are still more likely to have tumors than those of the Honokowai [ohana](#), although we know enough now that we don't worry about many of them: they will recover on their own. The sad side of the story, which we continue to point out, is that the youngest turtles are also the ones most vulnerable. The disease is more severe, progresses more rapidly, and in almost every case in our experience—[Kamaha'o](#) is the only exception—results in the disappearance of the little honu. Dead? We can't say for sure, but what would you think?

We haven't seen many little honu at Honokowai this summer, but there are several at Kuamo'o. Sadly, they tend to have tumors.



We made two dives at Kuamo'o. We saw this young honu on our second dive. The small tumors indicate the onset of FP, which means we probably won't see this turtle

the kind words. On Oahu you can volunteer with Malama Na Honu. See...

next summer.

Click image to enlarge

2008 Roll Call

The summer is well past the midway mark and we haven't yet listed the honu we've seen from past summers. Mostly this is because the list is alarmingly short. There are a number of honu we recognize but not by name. That is, we've never given them names, and we haven't done the work necessary to find out what numbers they have in our database. Further, finishing our book has taken up most of our resources in recent summers, so we haven't updated the database. There are many honu we know have been around for more than one summer, but we can't quantify how many or which ones.

When I say the list is short, I mean the list of our named turtles. Here it is:

- [Tiamat](#)
- [Raphael](#)
- [Kamaha'o](#)
- Hoa
- Kiniana (`ea)
- Iakeke (`ea)
- Wai?
- Wana
- Ho'omalu
- Amuala
- [Ho'oulu](#)
- 1996 Turtle 12
- 5690

Yes, I know 1996 Turtle 12 and 5690 aren't names as such, but 5690 is a special case, and 1996 Turtle 12 is an old familiar face who we've never named for some reason. He rates a mention while some other numbered turtles don't because he's a favourite.

Where are the others? Well, we see a lot of daytime feeding inshore this summer, so we don't expect to see as many honu out on the reef. We also know that food is not as plentiful as it once was in the area, so we think some of the old regulars have just moved up or down the coast a bit. [Zeus](#) (not seen this summer) is an example.

Zeus first went missing in 2003. Prior to that, we'd seen him frequently every summer since 1994, and we actually had a sighting of him reported to us from 1992. He was missing all of 2004 as well, and we had given up hope of seeing him again. Then, [on my birthday in 2005](#), there he was, swimming gracefully past. We saw him again in 2006 and 2007, although once only in both summers. So we know Zeus is out there, he just isn't hanging around within our diving range.

Wana is behaving much the same way. We've seen her, but she was at The Rock, where we seldom visit now. She's drifting north and although we know she's okay, we miss her. Others we worry about. [Tutu](#) has been missing since 2006. We thought she'd be migrating that year, so we weren't alarmed, even though the folks who monitor the nesting activity at the French Frigate Shoals didn't report seeing her. Then she was missing in 2007, and again she wasn't seen at the FFS. She wasn't there when we visited Maui in January, and she's not out there this summer. Not good news.

Ho'oulu returns!

We're not sure what to make of Ho'oulu. We didn't see her during [our winter visit](#), and she wasn't there in July either. Ho'oulu is fully adult, though, so there are three possibilities:

1. She's nesting somewhere other than East Island (FSS). There are more reports this summer of green turtles nesting on the main islands than ever before. Ho'oulu is so huge we can't believe she doesn't nest somewhere, but she doesn't have tags, she's never had a number engraved on her shell, and she doesn't have a PIT tag. I'd stake the house that she's a nester, though.
2. She's off feeding when she used to spend time resting. She's huge, Jerry. Huge! You don't get that huge without a lot of food, and as I mentioned, food is scarce around here now. I suspect she has a lot to do with that. Did I mention she's huge?
3. She's following the pattern of Zeus and Wana. She's found a new place to stay, and she only comes back to Reef 2 occasionally.

Whatever the case might be, much to our delight we found her last week resting in exactly the same place she's preferred since forever. As usual, she barely took notice of us so we both managed to get photos, one of which I now present for your viewing enjoyment:



After a prolonged absence, we sighted Ho'oulu in the same spot she's used since 1992. She was her normal reserved self, and rested quietly for several portraits. Ursula is in the background snapping away.

Click image to enlarge

Hatchlings!

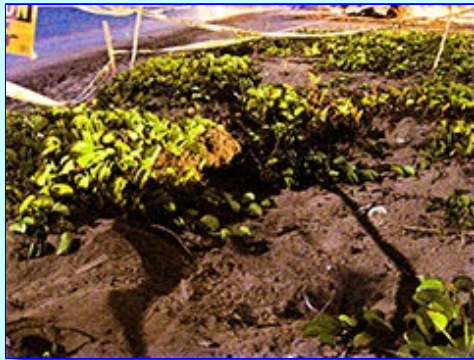
As I was trying to finish this blog yesterday, Ursula returned from Lahaina where she'd just checked 5690's nest #3. She was excited because she thought she'd seen signs of impending hatchling emergence. So we hastily grabbed our cameras and rushed back to watch.

When we got there, it did indeed look like the hatchlings were about to make their appearance. The down side was that although there was a bright half-moon in the sky (good for attracting the hatchlings in the direction of the water) there was not enough light for photography. Using flash to photograph hatchlings is a strict no-no, so I resorted to long exposure times and hoped for the best. The results are pretty noisy/grainy, but all things considered they turned out fairly well.



32 second exposure of us waiting for hatchlings. As you can see, Ursula is much better at staying still than I am.

Click image to enlarge



32 second exposure of hatchlings emerging —but the little critters scoot too fast to show up! Who said turtles are slow?

Click image to enlarge

By the time it was over, we'd seen about 50 hatchlings scampering down the beach and into the waves. Despite the moon, it still dark enough to make it hard to be sure exactly how many there were. As far as we could tell, however, nobody got confused and headed the wrong way. It was a rare thrill, one we won't soon forget.

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