



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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Catching up (July 20-August 2)

August 3rd, 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.

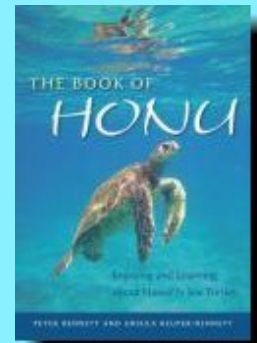
Highlights resume

While I still think of Rick every day, the pain has subsided enough to start posting again. I have two weeks to catch up on, so I'll just review some of the highlights.

Kiniana

On July 20, during our first dive in really clear water, we spotted a hawksbill resting peacefully on the reef. Hawksbills, or 'ea in Hawaiian, are rare in Hawaii, so we always feel lucky when we see one. Rarer still is to see one resting—usually they are actively foraging or swimming across the reef. Rarest of all is to see one resting next to a honu. In our experience, honu and 'ea don't get along.

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A rare turtle in an even rarer situation: lying around with a honu. This is Kiniana, first seen at Honokowai in 2000.

Click image to enlarge

Best of all, the `ea turned out to be one we know: Kiniana! We first met her in 2000, when she was a lot smaller. Now, she holds the record for the largest `ea we've seen. Because she is so large and still has a teeny tail, we're fairly confident Kiniana is a female. She's in excellent health as far as we can tell, and probably should be laying eggs somewhere this summer or next. They still use metal tags on nesting hawksbills, so it's possible that she'll turn up with jewelry sometime soon, maybe even this summer.

The new Mt. Balazs

If you've been following along, you know that for the past two summers we've seen a change in the habits of the Honokowai [ohana](#). There's been a substantial increase in daytime foraging, particularly right in front of our condo. We've speculated that this is why we aren't seeing some of our old friends out on the reefs, and why others are now irregular in attendance.

Another possibility for absences, of course, is that the honu have moved. While they typically return to the same spot on the reef year after year, eventually some of them shift to a new preference. We like to think that turtles like [Tutu](#) are still around, just a bit up or down the coast and out of our diving range. We know this is true for [Zeus](#), for example.

One of these new gathering places is actually not so new to us. It's a large coral head that we used to pass regularly as we went back and forth to the Turtle House. It's also closer to shore than the honu used to prefer, and until this summer,

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

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July 2008 (3)

February 2008 (1)

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October 2007 (4)

September 2007 (5)

August 2007 (4)

July 2007 (2)

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

we'd never seen a honu near it.

Now, however, whenever we check it (it's out of our normal dive plan these days) we find six or seven honu around and sometimes on it. Because it's a large coral head away from the reef, it reminds me of Mt. Balazs, the coral head at North House that the honu eventually undermined to the point that [it collapsed and literally disappeared](#). That isn't likely to happen this time, since this coral head is much larger and the honu can't wedge themselves under the edges as easily.

shell? Hawksbill sea turtle are not...

[Peter](#): Aloha Marsha, Mahalo for the kind words. On Oahu you can volunteer with Malama Na Honu. See...



1996 Turtle 12 sits atop the latest honu attraction at Honokowai.

Click image to enlarge

How long they'll gather round it, however, is anyone's guess. This one is within snorkeling range for the visitors and is shallow enough that people will inevitably dive down "to get a better look." If you're one of those visitors, please don't do that. Wait patiently at a respectful distance, and sooner or later one of them will come up for air. Works much better.

Not exactly a highlight: Wai? is back

Wai? (yes, the question mark is part of the name) is the only known cross between a honu and a hawksbill. Last summer, we saw her (we think Wai? is probably female but no one knows for sure) and reported that we saw indications of the onset of FP. On our ninth dive, we saw her for the first time this summer. We were distressed to see that our prediction had been accurate: Wai? definitely has tumors.

While the tumors are not yet severe, and in fact the signs are that she has just a mild case that could already be in regression, there is still cause for alarm. Since Wai? is a crossbreed, she is potentially a vector for a species jump. FP has never been reported in the Hawaiian hawksbill. Nobody knows how FP spreads, so we worry that Wai? could somehow transmit the disease to the `ea. We think the chances of that are small indeed, but they definitely aren't zero.

Likeke

We've noted that the `ea are rare, and they are. Reports say that there are only about 100 nesting hawksbills in the Hawaiian Islands, and they are listed as critically endangered. On the other hand, we spotted our second hawksbill of the summer on July 25th, swimming directly towards us. Completely unconcerned about our presence, the turtle swam right between us and proceeded to a patch of coral a short distance away, where a "tastie" was apparently concealed. In short order, pieces of coral littered the bottom as the `ea engaged in a search for food.



*Likeke charged up the middle between us,
providing an excellent photo op.*

Click image to enlarge

The behaviour indicates that this turtle is no stranger to divers, so we suspect that her range includes Old Airport Beach, a popular snorkeling and diving site just south of Honokowai. We've actually met this 'ea before, and in fact one of the pictures in our book shows a honu snapping at her—a rare turn of events, since it is usually the 'ea who snap at the honu.

We didn't name this hawksbill last summer—we usually wait for inspiration, some signal—or perhaps even the turtle to “suggest” a name. We went to the Hawaiian Boys' Names dictionary and chose *Likeke*, which is Hawaiian for Richard, Rick and Ricky. I don't think I have to explain why.

5690 makes nest #6

On the night of July 28, 5690 made three false crawls, but no nest. We therefore expected her to nest on the night of the 29th, so we got to the beach early—or so we thought. It was only 8:30 but when we arrived 5690 was already crawling up. She'd just gotten past the high tide line when I spotted her. She started some tentative digging in short order, and we thought, “Cool, early bedtime!” Silly us.

She dug for a while, then decided she didn't like that spot so she moved further [mauka](#) and started over. We thought this was good, since the first choice had been a little too close to the high water line for our liking. It added 45 minutes to our night, but so what. Still looked like an early finish to us.

She spent almost an hour flapping about and digging a fair-sized pit—and then she started to crawl [makai](#)! Visions of another false crawl flashed through our heads but no, she stopped midway between her first effort and her second and started anew. Hopes for a quick nest faded as she dug industriously for another hour or so. Still, we were grateful that she hadn't headed back into the water, and we could see from her movements that she was working hard on her egg chamber.

Eventually she stopped for a couple of minutes, which normally means that she's starting to drop her eggs. This time it was clear something was wrong. Normally, when she's laying she drops her head, but we could see that she had her head raised and was looking around. Oh no!

Oh yes. She started to move again, this time back to the pit she'd dug mauka. At least she was still determined to finish her nest, but now we could see it would be a loooong night. By this time she was digging in just about the darkest spot on the beach, and to make it even harder to see what she was doing, she was burrowing in vegetation that covered most of her shell. I had a brief hope that she'd get to digging the egg chamber quickly because she'd already dug a large body pit there, but no such luck. It was start-all-over for 5690.

At last, at about 12:45, she settled down and this time, her head drooped in concentration. After a couple of minutes, I slipped up behind her to make sure she was actually laying eggs. She was. Huge sighs of relief from us.



Things to do while you wait for 5690 to finish: make a 15 second time exposure. That's Ursula sneaking a few winks under the Mississauga flag.

Click image to enlarge

5690 finally swam away at almost exactly 3:00 AM, having covered up a much larger hole than usual in a much shorter time than she typically takes. Thankful for small mercies, we roped off the nesting area and made it home at 4 in the morning. Tiring, but as always, a thrill and an experience I wouldn't want to miss. Will she return for number 7 in two weeks? I sure hope so, because whether she does or not, we'll be walking the beach to find out.

Ho'omalulu

We've taken the kayak up to Hoaka a couple of times, but with mixed success. The first time, the wind came up and the water

was already murky. I jumped in the water and immediately saw Ho'omalū, our Hawaiian-Mexican crossbreed. She was swimming gracefully away, however, and I never got a chance to get a picture. Our second visit had much better conditions, but no Ho'omalū.

We haven't given up hope of getting a photo. She looked fine in the brief glimpse I got. We've always worried that she might contract FP but I saw no obvious tumors. Of course, I didn't have a chance to see if there were the subtle signs we recognize as the onset of the disease. Still, we know that she's out there and she still has all her body parts. That's something.

In conclusion

The ocean calls, so I'm cutting this off. Other things worthy of mention have happened, but they'll have to wait. Aloha!

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