

his summer, I've seen mostly small green turtles around my usual snorkeling place, but last week I found myself running into grown-ups right and left. Our adult turtles, it seems, have come home.

I use the term "home" in this case to mean the main Hawaiian Islands, because the turtles spend most of their time here, where they graze on seaweed and snooze on our beaches.

But every four years or so, Hawaii's adult greens heed the call of their hormones and migrate to the small sand islands inside French Frigate Shoals Atoll in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands. About 96% of our greens nest there, a remote place about 500 miles from Oahu. While there the turtles mate, and then the fertilized females dig holes in the sand and lay eggs.

Throughout the threeto four-month summer breeding season, a female lays approximately 100 eggs in each of four or five separate sand nests that she digs, and then covers, with her flippers. It's an exhausting effort.

Most green turtles reproduce only once every four years, resting up the three years in between for the next big push. Each year, about 25% of our turtles head northwest.

Knowing where our turtles laid eggs this year is crucial in helping them survive, because disaster struck in 2018. Soon after the turtles' nesting season ended last year, Hurricane Walaka destroyed most of their main nesting site, East Island, an 11-acre stretch of sand inside French Frigate Shoals Atoll.

With East Island gone, no one knew where the turtles would nest this year. To find out, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration scientists went to Oahu's North Shore turtle hangout in March and performed ultrasound tests on several adult females to see which had eggs developing inside.

Through skill, perseverance and good luck, the team found one and attached a satellite tag to her back. The female's

Please see SCOTT, B3

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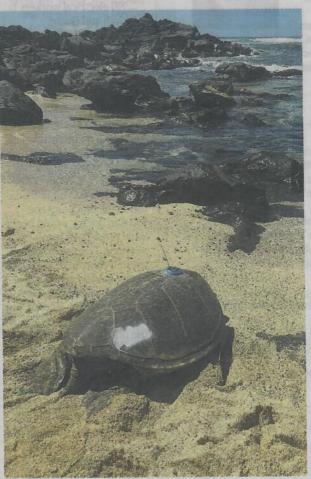
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mal name is OA48, but
delighted scientists
mamed her Motherload,
n loaded with yolked-up
cles destined to be

Shortly after, Motherload am to French Frigate als, making the journey 2-1/2 weeks. After mating males that also mited, Motherload laid four thes of eggs on Tern Is-1, the largest of the rening islands in the atoll. Lead Motherload's inspirfull story at 808ne.ws/wfzP.

4 team of NOAA bioloalso migrated to anch Frigate Shoals to dy nesting activity and ect reproductive data. included etching and ting a temporary numon adults to keep track mem during the nesting son. Now that adults migrated to home in the main Hawaiian mds, the public (or citiscientists) can help tify important foraging tats by reporting these bers.

you see a turtle with a ber on its shell, please a respectful distance feet and take a picture number, noting the hand date. Email the to and information to ectwildlife@noaa.gov.



MICHELLE BARBIERI / NOAA FISHERIES

Motherload, or OA48, outfitted with a satellite transmitter, made her way back to the water on Oahu's North Shore in March.

tress, call the statewide Marine Animal Emergency Hotline at 888-256-9840.

Producing offspring is an energy-intensive business for all species, but for Hawaii's green sea turtles, it's an extraordinary achievement, as is the work of tracking these migratory animals. Congratulations to all turtle moms and to the people who study them.

To reach Susan Scott, go to susanscott.net and click on "Contact" at the top of her home page.