



Turtle trauma

From Maui to Malaysia, sea turtles are falling victim to human influence and a deadly epidemic of tumors

By Burl Burlingame
bburlingame@starbulletin.com



Honolulu ★ Star-Bulletin

TODAY

SEC
Wat
Tool
Small

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2001 / 529-4774 / FEATURES@STARBULLETIN.COM



Turtle trauma

From Maui to Malaysia, sea turtles are falling victim to human influence and a deadly epidemic of tur

By Burl Burlingame
bburlingame@starbulletin.com

T AURIE MCKEON SAW her first sea turtles

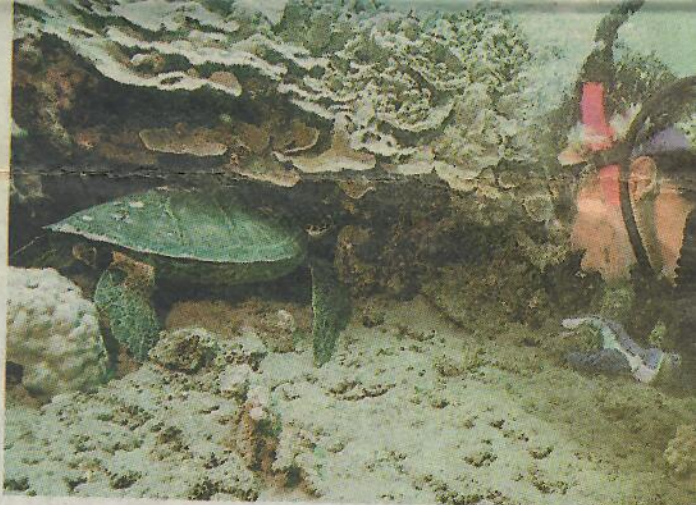


LAURIE MCKEON SAW her first sea turtles on the beaches of Malaysia. Driven by eons of evolutionary wiring, hundreds of leatherback turtles were desperately crawling ashore on a moonless night, attempting to lay eggs in the warm sands. As soon as the gravid females laid their eggs and crawled back into the sea, Malaysian teenagers dug up their eggs. All of their eggs. That night, on that Malaysian beach, an entire generation of leatherback sea turtles became soup. My god, thought McKeon, this is not ... sustainable.

>>><<<

Peter Bennett and Ursula Keuper-Bennett of Canada spend every summer diving in a turtle sanctuary area near Maui dubbed the "Turtle House," and in the process

have become lay experts in the narrow field of sea turtle behavior. To the Bennetts, the turtles are individuals, with varied appearances and moods, and they've given the creatures names. They taken hundreds of hours of video, thousands of photographs and reams of obser-



PHOTOS BY URSULA KEUPER-BENNETT/PETER BENNETT, WWW.TURTLEHOUSE.COM

Top, a turtle bears the tumors of fibropapillomatosis which is killing green sea turtles. Above, Makana was one of author Gray Davidson's favorite turtles. The photograph was taken in 1998. By 1999 Makana was showing signs of the disease, by 2000 she had numerous growths, and this year she was not sighted. FP is hardest on young sea turtles.

vations, an invaluable resource for behavioral scientists.

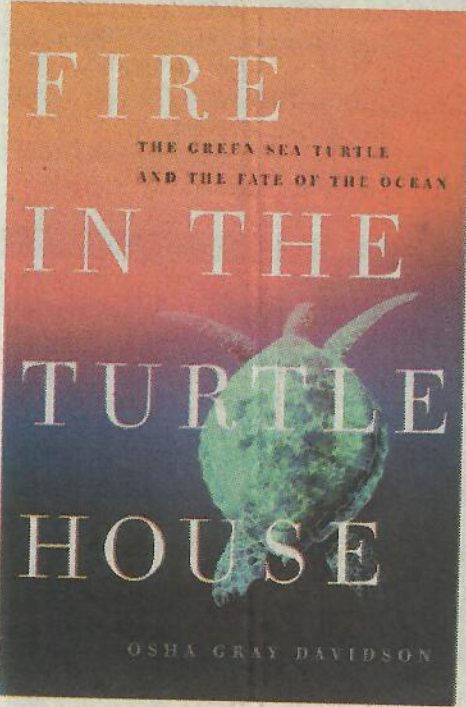
One turtle favorite was Clothahump, a cheerful little fellow who liked to play, and always the first to welcome humans back to the Turtle House. Clothahump, named for a turtle wizard in a fantasy story, darted here and there like a puppy, sleek and flashing beneath the waves.

But the last time the Bennetts saw Clothahump, he was mottled in leaking tumors, billowing out of his skin like yard mushrooms, trailing blood and pus in the water. The turtle had trouble moving, trouble seeing, trouble breathing. He circled his friends once and headed slowly away, into the vast blackness of deep water. He vanished. A videotape Peter Bennett shot of the encounter is shaky, for he was weeping into his face mask.

>>><<<

Something is killing the sea turtles of the world. Man takes his toll, but now there is a type of herpes virus called fibropapillomatosis.

Please see Turtle, D6



"Fire in the Turtle House: The Green Sea Turtle and the Fate of the Ocean": By Osha Gray Davidson (Public Affairs, 258 pages, \$26).



Help us trim our pages in the colors of the season

For the seventh year, the Star-Bulletin will feature some colorful ornaments to dress our pages in the holiday spirit. We will give away a Christmas tree ornament that you can draw and color. Starting Nov. 26, we will feature one each day in this newspaper. On Christmas Day, we will show them all on a Christmas page and announce which one wins our prize of \$100 and 10 movie passes.

Show above are some examples from past years to give you a few ideas.

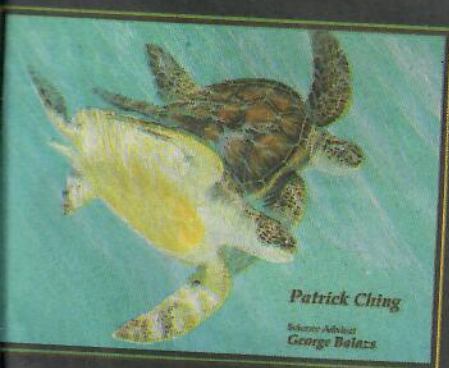
The contest is open to children through sixth grade. Fill out the coupon at right and attach it to the back of your drawing. Only one entry per child, and no entries will be returned. Children of employees of Oahu Publications are ineligible.

Enter any time between now and Dec. 4, but the sooner, the better.

Your name: _____ Age: _____ Grade: _____
 Address: _____
 Home phone number: _____
 School: _____ Teacher: _____

Send entries to: "Make an Ornament," Honolulu Star-Bulletin features section, 7 Waterfront Plaza, Suite 210, Honolulu, HI 96813. No fax or email entries.

Sea Turtles of Hawai'i



Patrick Ching
Science Advisor
George Balazs

Book imparts fondness for sea turtles

"Sea Turtles of Hawai'i"
By Patrick Ching (University of Hawaii Press, \$16.95)

This is a handsome companion book by author/artist/naturalist Patrick Ching. It focuses on the honu, the Hawaiian green species of sea turtle, although several of the seven species known worldwide pass through Hawaiian waters.

Ching takes a scrapbook approach, gathering diverse ma-

terials from the scientific, Hawaiian and fishing communities. The sea turtle is not only sacred to Hawaiians as *aumakua*, it was considered good eating as well. Ching provides a brisk overview of the sea turtle's anatomy.

A section on dangers to this threatened species has a section devoted to the mysteries of fibropapilloma, and sections on the modern fondness for sea turtle conservation shows

tourists encountering this most ancient of sea creatures.

The meat of the book, however, is the many splendid color photographs — many taken by Ching — and Ching's evocative, naturalistic paintings of the animals.

It's impossible not to become fond of sea turtles after leafing through this book.

Burl Burlingame

E:
as to
species

DI
rst noticed by a
turtle scientists
George Balazs, the
own exponen-
st decade, strik-
sly all over the

cellent chance,
hat "this crea-
rived for 100
nger than the
ecome extinct

one of the
Honu Project,
nsortium ded-
citizens up to
ht of sea tur-
ofit agency,
old, "concon-
ional videos
al activism —
e a larger au-
te a smaller
Keon.

osis, or FP,
book disease
ect



Heana was the name given to this turtle sighted in 1996. The name means "victim."

URSULA KEUPER-BENNETT/PETER BENNETT, WWW.TURTLES.ORG

Osha Gray Davidson to speak

>> 7:30 p.m. tomorrow at the Waikiki Aquarium, 2777 Kalakaua Ave. Call 923-9741. Free.

>> 6:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Maui Ocean Center, 192 Ma'alaea Road. Call (808) 270-7085.

>> 7 p.m. Thursday at Kilauea Visitor Center, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park; \$1 donation. Call (808) 985-6014 or (808) 985-6011.

Book sales will benefit the Waikiki Aquarium. The Honu Project can be reached at P.O. Box 61449, Honolulu, HI 96839 and at <http://www.Hawaii50.com/honu> Call 732-4668 or direct email to honuea@lava.net.

of the sea, and he's right. What happens in the sea affects us all, and we understand so little about it.

"Oceans ARE sacred. We need to treat them that way. Everything flows from that. The good news is that if man is doing this to the ocean, then we can undo it."

was created. There were more pressing concerns. Although sea turtles were on the endangered species lists, they were victims of gillnets, of habitat destruction, of ballooning popularity — particularly in the Pacific — as an exotic meal. Some Hawaiians felt they had an aboriginal right to kill sea turtles.

And throughout the world, as beaches became developed and industrialized, the sea turtles' Achilles' heel — their dependence on laying eggs on land — became more and more a vulnerability.

"There's so much we still

don't know about sea turtles. How do they navigate across thousands of miles of ocean? There are the 'lost years,' between the time the turtles hatch and mature and return as adults — we don't know where they go," mused McKeon.

The main problem at the moment, however, looming over the species' future like a thundercloud on the horizon, is the mystery disease. The Honu Project and the Waikiki Aquarium are sponsoring a talk and book-signing by science writer Osha Gray Davidson, whose "Fire in the Turtle House" documents the work of dedicated

scientists and volunteers to understand FP.

We caught Davidson in California. "There's a pathogenic firestorm on the loose," he said. "Clearly, something has changed, and that's the shore waters around the world, and that's our doing. The water has become friendly to diseases, and created a metademic that is creating mass mortality.

"It's not just sea turtles. Other ocean creatures are becoming affected. We're fond of sea turtles, however; they're the ambassadors of the sea, sacred in many cultures. Kupuna Sam Kaai says we're all children

[BOX OFFICE]

ers, Inc.' on top second week

just nine days in theaters — reaching a total of \$123 million — to eclipse previous animated film record holder "Toy Story 2," which took 11 days to reach that level in 1999. Both are from the Disney/Pixar partnership.

"The public obviously is buying this picture in a way that is record-breaking for animation and that bodes extremely well for our business," said Ch...

ing year for Hollywood. The industry is on track to surpass last year's \$7.7 billion total.

"It's pretty much a foregone conclusion we'll break last year's record," said Paul Dergarabedian, president of Exhibitor Relations, which tracks the box office.

"Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone," the movie based

"It could be one of the biggest weekends of the year, maybe one of the biggest weekends of all time," Dergarabedian said.

Advance tickets are selling briskly and no other major releases scheduled that weekend.

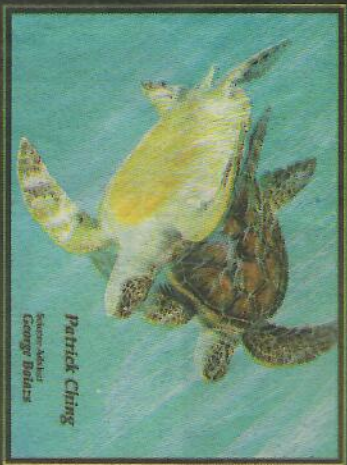
Opening in second place over the weekend was "Shallow Hal," with \$23.3 million in sales.

"Monsters, Inc." is monstrous. I have no problem being No. 2 to that," said Bruce Snyder, president of domestic distribution for 20th Century Fox.

starring John Travolta. It took in \$8 million.

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday:

1. "Monsters, Inc.," \$46.2 million
2. "Shallow Hal," \$23.3 million
3. "The One," \$9.1 million
4. "Domestic Disturbance," \$8.5 million
5. "Heist," \$8 million
6. "K-Pax," \$6.2 million
7. "Thirteen Ghosts," \$4.2 million



Book imparts fondness for sea turtles

"Sea Turtles of Hawaii"
By Patrick Ching (University of Hawaii Press, \$16.95)

This is a handsome companion book by author/artist/naturalist Patrick Ching. It focuses on the honu, the Hawaiian green species of sea turtle, although several of the seven species known worldwide pass through Hawaiian waters.

Ching takes a scrapbook approach, gathering diverse ma-

terials from the scientific, Hawaiian and fishing communities. The sea turtle is not only sacred to Hawaiians as an *makua*, it was considered good eating as well. Ching provides a brisk overview of the sea turtle's anatomy.

A section on dangers to this threatened species has a section devoted to the mysteries of fibropapilloma, and sections on the modern fondness for sea turtle conservation shows

tourists encountering this most ancient of sea creatures. The meat of the book, however, is the many splendid color photographs — many taken by Ching — and Ching's evocative, naturalistic paintings of the animals.

It's impossible not to become fond of sea turtles after leafing through this book.

Burl Burlingame

TURTLE: Disease threatens to wipe out species

Continued From D1

pillomatosis. First noticed by a handful of sea turtle scientists like Hawaii's George Balazs, the disease has grown exponentially over the last decade, striking simultaneously all over the world.

There's an excellent chance, says McKeon, that "this creature that has survived for 100 million years, longer than the dinosaurs, will become extinct in our lifetime."

McKeon is one of the founders of the Honu Project, an educational consortium dedicated to bringing citizens up to speed on the plight of sea turtles. The nonprofit agency, about a decade old, "concentrates on educational videos rather than political activism — we'd rather educate a larger audience than alienate a smaller one," explained McKeon.

Fibropapillomatosis, or FP, was just a rare textbook disease when the Honu Project



was created. There were more pressing concerns. Although sea turtles were on the endangered species lists, they were victims of gillnets, of habitat destruction, of ballooning popularity — particularly in the Pacific — as an exotic meal. Some Hawaiians felt they had an aboriginal right to kill sea turtles.

And throughout the world, as beaches became developed and industrialized, the sea turtles' Achilles' heel — their dependence on laying eggs on land — became more and more a vulnerability.

"There's so much we still

don't know about sea turtles.

•How do they navigate across thousands of miles of ocean? There are the 'lost years,' between the time the turtles hatch and mature and return as adults — we don't know where they go," mused McKeon.

The main problem at the moment, however, looming over the species' future like a thundercloud on the horizon, is the mystery disease. The Honu Project and the Waikiki Aquarium are sponsoring a talk and book-signing by science writer Osha Gray Davidson, whose "Fire in the Turtle House" documents the work of dedicated

scientists and volunteers to understand FP. We caught Davidson in California. "There's a pathogenic firestorm on the loose," he said. "Clearly, something has changed, and that's the shore waters around the world, and that's our doing. The water has become friendly to diseases, and created a metabolic that is creating mass mortality.

"It's not just sea turtles. Other ocean creatures are becoming affected. We're fond of sea turtles, however; they're the ambassadors of the sea, sacred in many cultures. Kupuna Sam Kai says we're all children

of the sea, and he's right. What happens in the sea affects us all, and we understand so little about it.

"Oceans ARE sacred. We need to treat them that way. Everything flows from that. The good news is that if man is doing this to the ocean, then we can undo it."

Osha Gray Davidson to speak

>> 7:30 p.m. tomorrow at the Waikiki Aquarium, 2777 Kalakaua Ave. Call 923-9741. Free.

>> 6:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Maui Ocean Center, 192 Ma'alaea Road. Call (808) 270-7085.

>> 7 p.m. Thursday at Kilauea Visitor Center, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park; \$1 donation. Call (808) 985-6014 or (808) 985-6011.

Book sales will benefit the Waikiki Aquarium. The Honu Project can be reached at P.O. Box 61449, Honolulu, HI 96839 and at <http://www.Hawaii50.com/honu> Call 732-4668 or direct email to [hONU@aol.com](mailto:honu@aol.com).