

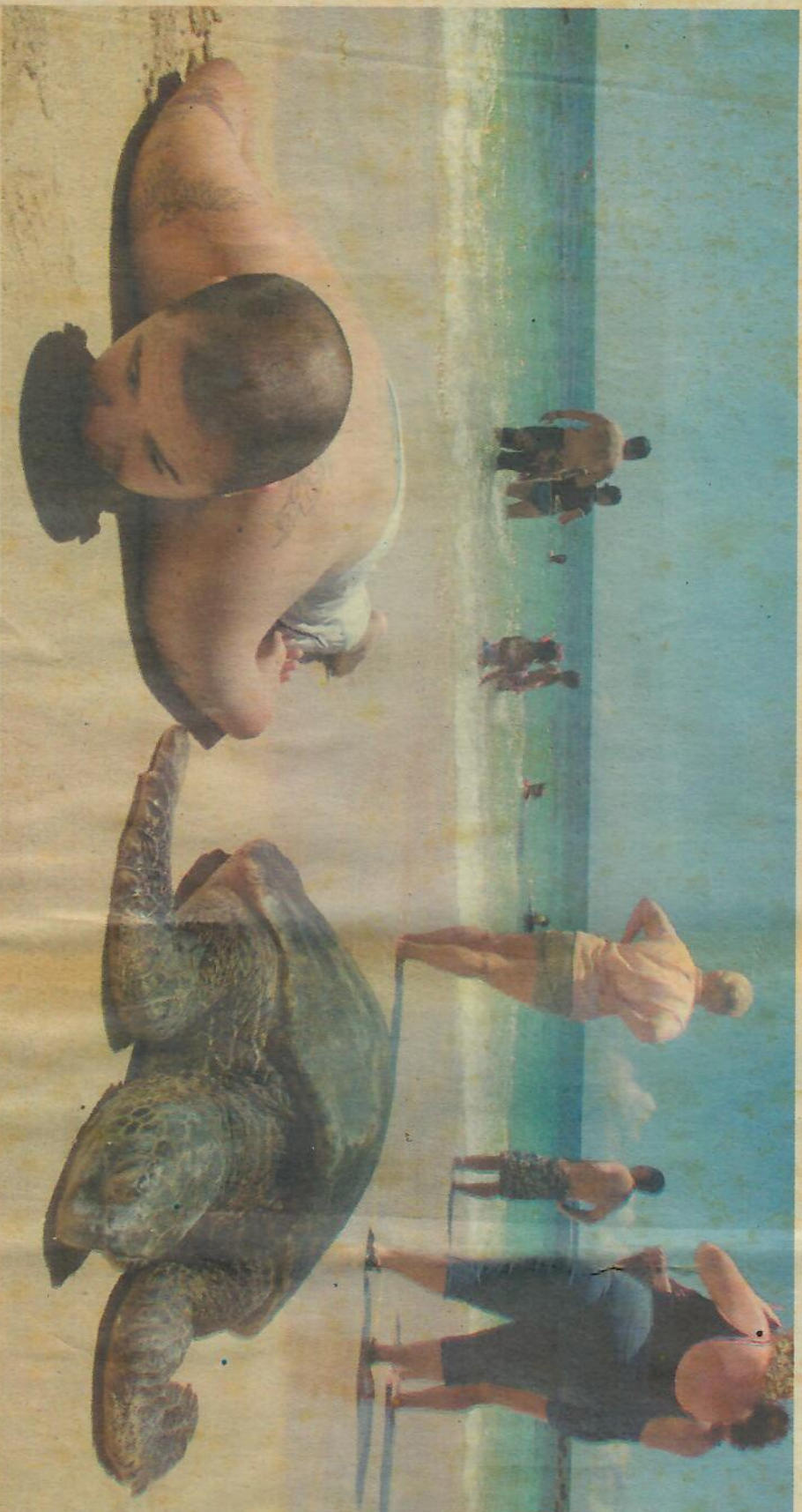
Star Bulletin

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AUGUST 14, 2005

75 cent

TURTLES BECOME MAJOR TOURIST ATTRACTIONS AT LANIAKEA BEACH



Yogi Lopez posed next to a turtle as his family took a photo of him at Laniakea Beach on Oahu's North Shore. The turtles have become used to humans and approach beachgoers and swimmers, looking for easy handouts of seaweed.

CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL / CRUSSELL@STARBULLETIN.COM

Analyst skeptical of Hawaii gas cap

The oil economist says a rumor could create a fuel shortage

By Rod Antone and B.J. Reyes

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An oil industry economist warns that having a gas cap Hawaii is potentially as bad as some make it out to be.

John Felmy, an economist and director of the Washington D.C.-based American Petroleum Institute, said depending on how people react, it could lead to a situation such as Molokai had recently.

"Everybody lined up because of a rumor and it created a shortage," he said. "The existence of this legislation is a bit uneasy. In terms of consumers ... all you need is some delay reporting that there's a problem and it becomes on

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CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR TOP SECOND QUARTER PROD

Guam war survivors seek compensation
As Guam observes tomorrow's 60th anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War II, momentum is building to compensate Guam residents for abuses they suffered under Japan's 32-month occupation. Because a 1951 treaty absolved Japan of individual American war claims, the U.S. would be responsible to pay for abuses committed by Japanese soldiers on American nationals on American territory. **NEWS, PAGE A14**



WHAT'S NEWS TODAY

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>> Scott Kekuewa Kikioti, a University of Hawaii doctoral candidate in archaeology, and archaeologist Kehaulani Souza will map several ancient Hawaiian ceremonial sites.
>> Beth Flint, a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service biologist, will check the well-being of plants and birds on the island. **Please see Teachers, A5**

Administration ship Hi'alakai yesterday to spend the next week on this windswept rock. Two archaeologists, two biologists and one teacher will sleep in pup tents, eat canned food heated on a camp stove and drink only the water they brought with them. But they didn't get off at Nihoa to be comfortable. Everyone going ashore has a job to do.

island drop vertically into a rich, deep-blue ocean that really does feel like the middle of nowhere. Five participants in an educationally oriented program of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are on the island drop vertically into a rich, deep-blue ocean that really does feel like the middle of nowhere.

ABOARD THE HI'ALAKAI >>
The island of Nihoa lives up to its Hawaiian name, which means "The Island of Jagged Cliffs." The sheer cliffs of the 156-acre island drop vertically into a rich, deep-blue ocean that really does feel like the middle of nowhere. Five participants in an educationally oriented program of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are on the island drop vertically into a rich, deep-blue ocean that really does feel like the middle of nowhere.

Nihoa voyagers explore grasshopper problem

strip of white sand has turned into a tourism magnet with a new nickname: "Turtle Beach." But its popularity is now posing problems — for the threatened turtle species and for residents of the area. Over-eager visitors have been grabbing the turtles, luring them with the ample seaweed in its waters. As word has spread, this once-tranquil spot has become a favorite spot for green sea turtles to bask in the sun and feed on the abundant seaweed in its waters. As word has spread, this once-tranquil spot has become a favorite spot for green sea turtles to bask in the sun and feed on the abundant seaweed in its waters.

A few yards up the beach, a 230-pound turtle lay flaked out on the sand, eyes closed, as a dozen people clustered around, taking turns posing and snapping photos. In the past few years, Lanaikea has become a favorite spot for green sea turtles to bask in the sun and feed on the abundant seaweed in its waters. As word has spread, this once-tranquil spot has become a favorite spot for green sea turtles to bask in the sun and feed on the abundant seaweed in its waters.

stepped out of the ocean, breathless after snorkeling with Hawaiian green sea turtles at Lanaikea Beach on Oahu's North Shore. "There were two of them swimming around, and I was really, really close to them," he said last week, the imprint of his mask outlining his eager eyes. "They were eating, doing their thing, and it was awesome."

Two archaeologists on the trip will also document ancient Hawaiian ceremonial sites
By Diana Leone
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ROUBLE

HONOLULU STAR-BULLETIN / SUNDAY, AUGUST 14, 2005



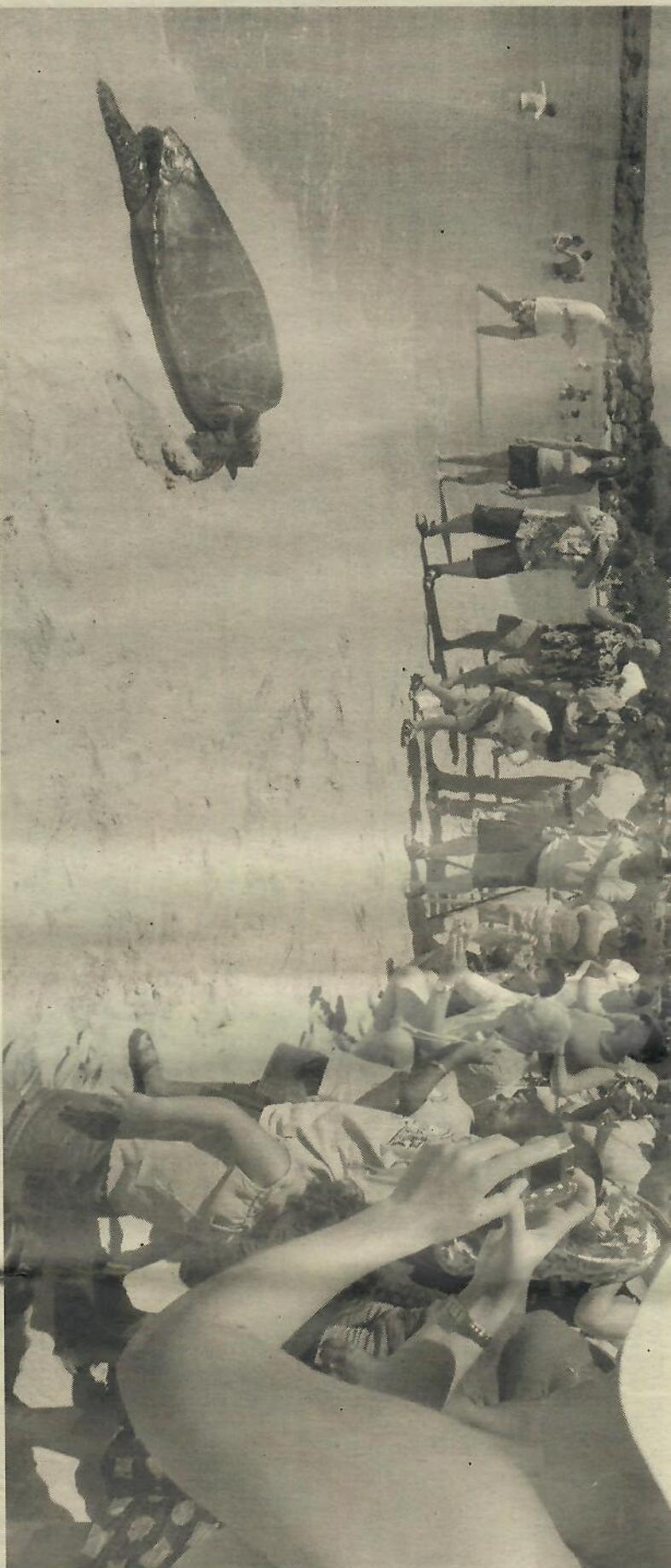
CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL / CRUSSELL@STARBULLETIN.COM

Tour bus visitors gathered to view and photograph a green sea turtle sunning itself at Laniakea Beach. The Marine Turtle Research Program advises people not to feed or tease the turtles with food and not to touch them. Incidents of nipping and biting by the turtles have been reported.

Turtles: Word of the animals' congregation has spread to guidebooks and tour companies

Continued from A1

Frigate Shoals. In the summer of



Tour bus visitors gathered to view and photograph a green sea turtle sunning itself at Laniakea Beach. The Marine Turtle Research Program advises people not to feed or tease the turtles with food and not to touch them. Incidents of nipping and biting by the turtles have been reported.

CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL / CRUSSELL@STARBUCKET.COM

Turtles: Word of the animals' congregation has spread to guidebooks and tour companies

Continued from A1

handfuls of green seaweed and even building sand castles on their backs.

Curious beachgoers stream across Kamehameha Highway, risking accidents and slowing traffic to a stop on a daily basis. Illegally parked tour vans disgorge crowds. Residents complain about blocked access to their homes and commercialization of the beach.

"All of a sudden, it's like the tourist spot," said Toni Slicker, a North Shore resident who surfs often at Laniakea. "Somehow, somebody's got to take control. I'm all for people seeing the turtles, but they don't keep their distance."

"People tug on the fins, be-



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Erin Seibert from the Marine Turtle Research Program observed a green sea turtle at Laniakea Beach with visitors Ed and Penny Meyers. Seibert spends time at the beach monitoring the turtles and educates visitors about the threatened species.

TURTLE TIPS

Hawaiian green sea turtles are a threatened species protected by state and federal law. It is illegal to disturb them and violators are subject to fines.

- >> Never feed or try to feed them.
- >> Do not crowd, handle or tease them.
- >> Observe turtles from a distance.
- >> Always allow them a clear route to deeper water.
- >> Do not touch them.

Frigate Shoals. In the summer of 2004, his program counted 540 females there. The numbers fluctuate because every turtle doesn't nest every year, but Balazs called 2004 "our greatest year on record."

"It's an amazing story that we have 'problems' to deal with like this, in terms of a proliferation of sea turtles, a species that many, many people in Hawaii love," he said. "To be dealing with the issue of crowding is certainly a lot more comfortable than it was in 1972 and 1973, when the same tourists that are now on the beach were ordering turtle steak for \$13.95."

Still, residents are hoping some solutions will come quickly both for the turtles'

cause the parent wants to get the picture," she said. "And the turtles are getting aggressive because they're getting fed now all the time."

The situation is catching the attention of authorities. Reacting to numerous complaints of turtle harassment, the Marine Turtle Research Program, part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, launched a "show turtles aloha" campaign last month.

Bold yellow banners on the beach tell visitors "Please do not crowd, handle, feed or tease" the turtles. A permanent sign tacked to a twisted ironwood tree notes that it is illegal to disturb the turtles on land or in the ocean and that violators are subject to fines.

"It's gone from dozens of people daily to hundreds daily, up to a thousand, visiting the beach," said George Balazs, leader of the Marine Turtle Research Program. "Many of them were feeding the turtles. It has changed the turtles' behavior."

As these gentle, vegetarian creatures started to associate people with food, they have recently nipped children as well as adults with their sharp beaks, he said.

Every day since July 7, either Balazs or a staff member has staked out the beach, monitoring people's behavior and urging them to enjoy the turtles from a distance. The program also has sent fliers to tour bus companies and tries to make personal contact with each van driver who comes to the beach.

But it's hard for one staff member a day to keep up with the constant flow of people to the beach. And the problems extend beyond the beach.

"I think it's great that George Balazs is personally monitoring the situation, but I think we need 10 Georges," said Denise Antolini, a professor of environmental law who lives in nearby Pupukea. She and other residents would like to see a task force address the ecological, traffic, safety and health issues, such as the lack of toilets.

"We need to bring together the large number of concerned residents and agencies with responsibility and come up with a long-term solution that's beneficial to the turtles and the North Shore," she said.

A few turtles began hauling out at Laniakea in early 2000,

and wildlife officials were peppered with calls from people who thought the animals were in distress, Balazs said. But basking and resting on the beach is normal behavior for the species. Their numbers have grown, and 60 to 80 turtles now swim in the water at Laniakea on a good day, he said.

Green sea turtles are found throughout Hawaiian waters, and pop up regularly even in tourist hot spots like Waikiki and Hanauma Bay. But word of the turtle congregation at Laniakea has spread recently through guidebooks and other media, tour companies and even city bus drivers. The slowdown in traffic is enough to pique the interest of passersby.

"We were pretty much curious," said Miriam Whalay, who lives in Nuuanu and stopped by the beach with her husband, Chris, last week. "The traffic just stopped right here. We were thinking there was some kind of festival in Haleiwa. I had no idea the turtles were here."

She was part of a group admiring a basking turtle known to scientists as "L-4." Balazs, on duty that day in a broad-brimmed cloth hat, said the

female turtle had been clocked diving as deep as 330 feet in the ocean and makes a 1,000-mile round-trip to French Frigate Shoals to nest.

Balazs, a gregarious, 62-year-old biologist, knows the species better than any other human being, having devoted his life to their welfare. Balazs first became interested in Hawaiian sea turtles in 1969 when he and his wife, Linda, saw them being hoisted live from boats at Laniakea Harbor into waiting pickup trucks in a virtual assembly line, back in the days when turtles were hunted for their meat.

Concerned that the species might get wiped out, he began camping out in a pup tent at French Frigate Shoals in 1973 to document their numbers. Bolstered by that data, he later helped win a statewide ban on commercial harvesting in 1975. And in 1978, Hawaiian green sea turtles were named a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The turtles have made a dramatic rebound since Balazs first started studying them. In 1973, the junior scientist found only 70 Hawaiian green sea turtles nesting on East Island in French

sake and their own. "Traffic used to back up when surf was giant, but now it backs up almost every day," said Gil Riviere, chairman of the North Shore Neighborhood Board's Traffic and Transportation Committee. "The bottleneck is right at Laniakea. People are feeling held hostage to their houses."

Balazs said his program will continue its presence on the beach at least until the winter swells begin, when he predicts that problems will ease up.

"As soon as school starts and the first north swell comes, the issues at Laniakea will decline considerably," he said. "People won't be coming in those high numbers. And when the waves get real big, much of the sand sucks away and there is less habitat to bask on. The turtles change their behavior."

"I've had people say we need to close off this beach, but that's not Hawaii," he added. "That's not why we protected this species. We have a growing, recovering population of green turtles. They're willing to share their habitat with the community, but we need to live up to our responsibility and treat them with respect."

Gas: Price of regular unleaded would be \$2.72 per gallon if the gas cap were in place today

Continued from A1

If it were in place today, regular, unleaded gasoline would increase to about \$2.72 per gallon, according to a Star-Bulletin analysis of Public Utilities Commission figures.

Depending on where you buy your gas on Oahu, that price could be anywhere from 6 to 20 cents per gallon higher than what you pay now. But while gas cap supporters tout those prices will go down once main-land prices go down, those paying at the pump are somewhat

Supporters say the law should be given a chance to work and note that the PUC has the ability to adjust the price caps if necessary. The law also gives the governor power to suspend the caps if they are found to cause economic hardship.

"It's a fair law," said House Speaker Calvin Say.

In preparation for the first price caps, which are to be posted Aug. 24, the PUC provided preliminary calculations to the oil industry.

from Aug. 3-9, the PUC calculated the price cap for regular unleaded gas on Oahu at \$2.12 per gallon. The baseline is higher for neighbor islands because added costs for shipping and storage are factored in.

After factoring in taxes, the pump price was estimated by the Star-Bulletin to be \$2.72 a gallon on Oahu. That is about 11 cents higher than the average reported yesterday in Honolulu by AAA's Fuel Gauge Report.

On Maui, prices would be

consumers. Critics say gas stations are likely to charge the maximum possible while adjusting to the new regulations.

Manoa resident John Reich said he can not even afford to put in a full tank as it is.

"I put three dollars in three times today," he said. "I used to get 1.9 gallons for five bucks and now I get 1.7 gallons for five bucks."

"I think it's highway robbery."

Waialae resident Cory Had- don is against any increase but

Gas cap prices

Below is a list of the projected cost of a gallon of regular unleaded gasoline in various Hawaii markets if the state's gas cap law was in effect today. The prices are the result of a Star-Bulletin analysis of Public Utilities Commission figures. They do not include potential retailer markups.

PRICES IN DOLLARS

NIGHT FINAL

Honolulu Star-Bulletin

MONDAY, JANUARY 5, 2004 / THE PULSE OF PARADISE / STARBULLETIN.COM / 50 CENTS ON OAHU •

75 cents on neighbor islands

RETURN TO MARS



is a panoramic view from the right camera of Spirit's Mars landing site released today by NASA. The left and right camera images are combined to produce a 3-D image. See story below.

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AFTER 25 YEARS OF PROTECTION, TURTLES RECOVERING



FINGERPRINTING AND PHOTOGRAPHING

Many foreigners double-checked at U.S. airports

By Mark Niese
Associated Press

whose citizens are allowed to
come to the United States for...

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MONDAY, JANUARY 5, 2004 / THE PULSE OF PARADISE / STARBU

RETURN TO



This is a panoramic view from the right camera of Spirit's Mars landing site released today by NASA. The left and right ca

AFTER 25 YEARS OF PROTECTION, TURTLES RECOVERING



AFTER 25 YEARS OF PROTECTION, TURTLES RECOVERING



DIANA LEONE / DLEONE@STARBULLETIN.COM

Researcher George Balazs, left, and University of Hawaii-Hilo student Jonathan Robinson, right, check the health and growth rate of a green sea turtle at Punaluu Black Sands Beach on the Big Island. Balazs is the leader of the National Marine Fisheries Service's Marine Turtle Research Program in Hawaii. The Hawaiian green sea turtle, or honu, has been recovering steadily during the 25 years it has been protected by the Endangered Species Act.

Honolulu Star-Bulletin

MONDAY JANUARY 5, 2004 / THE PULSE OF PARADISE / STAR BULLETIN.COM / 50 CENTS ON OAHU

Green sea turtles coming back

Thanks in part to a Hawaii researcher, the threatened species is on the rebound

By Diana Leone

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THE FIRST YEAR Hawaii's green sea turtle expert counted the animals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, he found 67 nesting females at East Island, French Frigate Shoals.

Three decades later, on the same island, George Balazs' research team counted 467 nesting females in a season — a nearly 600 percent increase.

Using additional data from the main Hawaiian Islands and mathematical modeling, Balazs estimates that Hawaii now has as many as 35,000 mature green sea turtles and perhaps

250,000 juveniles age 6 or under.

What a difference 25 years under the protection of the Endangered Species Act can make.

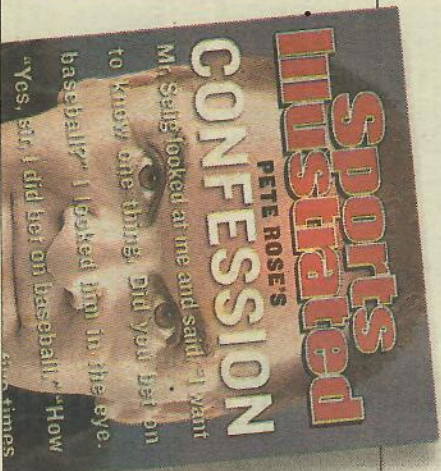
"You ask anybody that's a water person, that lives around the water — there's a definite increase in turtles," says Robert Morris, the sole veterinarian contracted by the National Marine Fisheries Service to treat sick and injured turtles statewide.

The honu's recovery is significant enough that if the trend continues, the Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service might ultimately remove the Hawaiian green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) from its threatened-species list.

That step, if taken, would involve public hearings, scientific reviews and time, says Balazs, leader of the Fisheries Service's Marine Turtle Research Project in Hawaii.

Please see Comeback, A6

DEAL OF THE DAY
FREE MEDIUM DRINK
 with purchase of a large popcorn. Coupon, A3
 Signature Theatres




True confession

Pete Rose admits he bet on baseball as manager. B2

Rose shown on the cover of the January 12 issue of Sports Illustrated which has excerpts from his soon-to-be released autobiography.

Business	C1	Crossword	D8	Local News	A3	Police / Fire	A4	Stocks	C3
Classifieds	C9	Dear Abby	D2	Movies	D3	Sports	B1	Television	D6
Comics	D8	Editorials	A10	Nation	A8	State/County	C8	Today	D1
Commentary	A11	Horoscope	D2	Obituaries	C7	govt. notices	C8	World	A8

 Tomorrow, mostly sunny with highs near 80. Light trade winds. Details, A4

MISSION QUICKLY GAUDED SLEEPY
 Hollow."
 "It's a hole in the ground, it's a window in the interior of Mars," said Steve Squyres, the member of the mission team.
 Please see Mars, A7

CORKY'S HAWAII



Classifieds / Call 529-4800

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Comeback: The atmosphere at the turtle exam is part science lab, part carnival, with diapers to wipe up spit

Continued From A1

And during such deliberations, the turtles would have Balazs going to bat for their welfare — just as he has for 30 years.

Balazs was a self-described “junior scientist” in 1973 when he first questioned whether people in Hawaii were harvesting honu at a rate faster than the animals could replace themselves.

His first few years of data collected in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands — where honu that later live in the main Hawaiian Islands go to mate and lay their eggs — confirmed his suspicion.

At the rate people were eating turtle steaks, the risk was growing that not enough of the animals would survive to perpetuate the species.

Balazs’ original work helped get the honu listed in 1978 as a threatened species, which means the potential of up to a \$25,000 fine and a year in prison for anyone convicted of harming or killing one.

The man universally considered Hawaii’s honu expert seems to be the only person surprised at the impact of his work.

“He’s a one-man show. He’s driven and dedicated to honu. That’s his life,” says Morris. “His days off, what’s George doing? He’s out doing turtle work someplace. Not only the Hawaiian turtles, but in Japan and all over the world.”

A Canadian couple that has been diving with sea turtles during summers on Maui since 1988 and promotes turtle conservation on their “Turtle Trax” Web site (www.turtles.org) has this to say about Balazs:





DIANA LEONE/DLEONE@STARBULLETIN.COM

George Balazs, leader of the National Marine Fisheries Service's Marine Turtle Research Program in Hawaii, measures a green sea turtle for its growth rate. John Giddons, a University of Hawaii-Hilo Marine Option Program student, at right, helped hold the honu.

"Without George, there would likely be no honu. He's contributed enormously to knowledge of all marine turtles, not just the honu."
 "There can only ever be one pioneer researcher — the first to unlock a door. Jane Goodall as the chimpanzee pioneer researcher," Ursula Keuper-Bennett and Peter Bennett said in an e-mail from their winter home near Toronto. "And for honu? That's George."

heckup roundup

IT'S MID-NOVEMBER, and Balazs is on his way to Punaluu Beach Park for his annual "checkup" of the honu that live there. As many turtles as possible will be caught, measured for growth and examined for health problems. Arriving at 10 a.m., Balazs is greeted by professors, staff and students in the University of Hawaii-Hilo's Marine Option program.

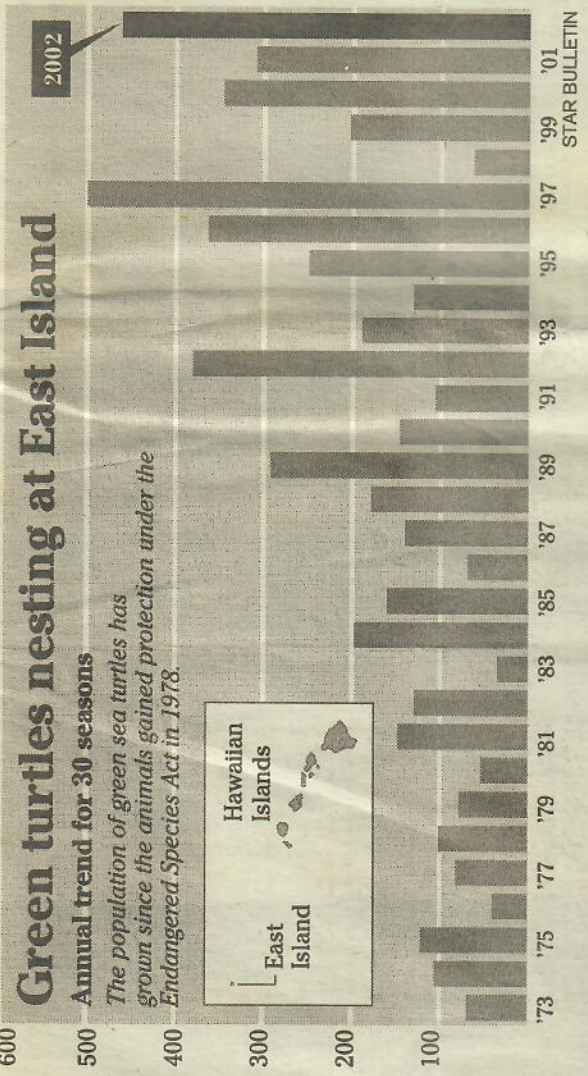
They have a canopy set up on the beach, with a sturdy table in its shade, for Balazs to perform his exam of as many turtles as four-person teams of students can bring to him over the next four hours.

The Punaluu study site has been ongoing for more than 20 years. At 19 other locations around the main Hawaiian Islands, Balazs and his staff of 4½ workers team with a variety of volunteers.

"It's people that make programs like this work," Balazs says.

Within a few minutes, one of the turtle-catching teams is back with the first patient of the day riding in the inner tube, fully up to the sun. After that, every 15 minutes, a crew pops out of the ocean with another turtle.

"They're definitely stronger than you think," says Ashley, a marine science and art



be known when currently tagged turtles are recaptured.

Advances in technology allow satellite tracking of turtles at sea that was impossible a decade ago. The battery-powered transmitters are attached to a turtle's shell using a surfboard repair kit and last several months.

Between 1996 and 2000, Balazs and Fisheries Service colleague Jeffrey Polovina have tracked 40 Hawaiian honu, more than 20 loggerheads and four olive ridley sea turtles.

A young captive-raised honu made history earlier this year, transmitting its location during a nine-month, 3,000-mile swim around the Hawaiian Islands.

Such information could eventually lead to guidelines for longline fishing boats that would help them avoid ocean areas where juvenile turtles congregate, Balazs says.

Balazs is tracking 27 loggerhead turtles off Japan, three loggerheads off Taiwan, three green turtles off Hawaii and eight loggerheads off California.

At East Island — the starting point of his turtle research career — Balazs mounted a "Turtle Cam" last year that scans the 12-acre island from atop a 65-foot pole, providing him with photos and video of turtle behavior dawn to dusk.

Balazs and company also head a network that rescues

How to help a turtle

If you spot what appears to be a sick, injured or dead sea turtle stranded on land, call:

- >> On Oahu: 983-5730.
 - >> On Maui: 984-8110.
 - >> On the Hilo Coast: 974-6208.
 - >> On the Kona Coast: 881-4200 or 327-4961.
 - >> On Kauai: 274-3521.
- Or, if a turtle has been killed or harmed, you can call the National Marine Fisheries Service at 541-2727 in Honolulu or toll-free at 800-853-1964.

two, three or four turtles" in a day or night of work.

The missing years

AFTER HATCHING, sea turtles swim away from land. They don't return to near-shore waters until they've grown from palm size to dinner plate size.

Balazs' research on turtle growth rates in the wild has shown him that a young turtle lives at sea for about six years.

"What they do during the years they are on the high seas is the last great mystery," Balazs says, and the area he'd recommend to anyone starting

When a field trip of kindergarten and first-grade students arrives, things really get lively. But it all contributes to Balazs' goal of getting more people to know honu. Because as far as he's concerned, to know them is to love them.

"Maybe someday you'll grow up and be a biologist, and you'll use the data we are collecting here today," Balazs tells the students from the Big Island's Pahala Elementary.

For adults, there are handouts with "frequently asked questions" about what the group is doing to the turtles. While Balazs and a crew

information will be entered into the massive database that has provided Balazs and others raw material for hundreds of scientific papers over the years.

The turtles seem to bear the indignities of the exam with a quiet patience. Their least favorite part appears to be the mouth exam. Several turtles respond by spitting out seaweed.

Balazs wipes up the smelly mess with disposable diapers brought for that purpose and continues.

When the checkup is complete, the turtle gets a blotch of temporary white paint on its shell to keep it from being captured.

time spent focused on turtles, Balazs would be excused for trying to get away from them during downtime. But honu occupy his leisure time, too. His destination on a recent vacation was a tour of temples honoring turtles on a small fishing island between mainland China and Taiwan. One of his hobbies is photographing, with permission, people's honu tattoos.

One day, he noticed a woman posing a baby on a blanket near a basking sea turtle at Laniakea on Oahu's North Shore, then

The r unatuu study site has been ongoing for more than 20 years. At 19 other locations around the main Hawaiian Islands, Balazs and his staff of 4½ workers team with a variety of volunteers.

"It's people that make programs like this work," Balazs says.

Within a few minutes, one of the turtle-catching teams is back with the first patient of the day riding in the inner tube, belly up to the sun. After that, every 15 minutes, a crew pops out of the ocean with another turtle.

"You're definitely stronger than you think," says Ashley Herd, a marine science and art student at UH-Hilo. The turtles captured this day measure up to 2 feet wide. "If they want to get away from you, they're gone."

Using a measuring tape and calipers, Balazs measures the dimensions of each animal. The

information will be entered into the massive database that has provided Balazs and others raw material for hundreds of scientific papers over the years.

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Balazs wipes up the smelly mess with disposable diapers brought for that purpose and continues.

When the checklist is complete, the turtle gets a blotch of temporary white paint on its shell to keep it from being captured again that day.

The atmosphere on the beach is part science lab, part carnival. Tourists and locals line up behind the plastic caution tapes around the work area to take pictures.

When a field trip of kindergarten and first-grade students arrives, things really get lively. But it all contributes to Balazs' goal of getting more people to know honu. Because as far as he's concerned, to know them is to love them.

"Maybe someday you'll grow up and be a biologist, and you'll use the data we are collecting here today," Balazs tells the students from the Big Island's Pahala Elementary.

For adults, there are handouts with "frequently asked questions" about what the group is doing to the turtles.

While Balazs and a crew work on one turtle, there are always two "on deck" to be examined. The steady supply contrasts sharply with the 1970s to the '90s, Balazs says, when "we'd be tickled pink if we were able to catch even

two, three or four turtles" in a day or night of work.

The missing years

AFTER HATCHING, sea turtles swim away from land. They don't return to near-shore waters until they've grown from palm size to dinner plate size.

Balazs' research on turtle growth rates in the wild has shown him that a young turtle lives at sea for about six years.

"What they do during the years they are on the high seas is the last great mystery," Balazs says, and the area he'd recommend to anyone starting turtle research today.

He also found that it takes 20 or more years for a honu to reach sexual maturity in the wild. Though they probably don't live to be 100, they do live a long time. How long may only

Such information could eventually lead to guidelines for longline fishing boats that would help them avoid ocean areas where juvenile turtles congregate, Balazs says.

Balazs is tracking 27 loggerhead turtles off Taiwan, three green turtles off Hawaii and eight loggerheads off California.

At East Island — the starting point of his turtle research career — Balazs mounted a "Turtle Cam" last year that scans the 12-acre island from atop a 65-foot pole, providing him with photos and video of turtle behavior dawn to dusk.

Balazs and company also head a network that responds to sea turtle strandings (alive or dead) on all the main islands and study the fibropapilloma tumor disease that has become the turtles' worst enemy now that hunting has been banned.

Despite all his professional

time spent focused on turtle Balazs would be excused for trying to get away from them during downtime. But honu occupy his leisure time too. His destination on a recent vacation was a tour of temples honoring turtles on a small fishing island between mainland China and Taiwan. One of his hobbies is photographing, with permission, people's honu tattoos.

One day, he noticed a woman posing a baby on a blanket near a basking sea turtle at Laniake on Oahu's North Shore, then taking a photograph. The woman told Balazs that she'd been taking monthly portraits of her child with a honu as a background.

Balazs was charmed. "I love to watch how people interact with them."

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Football players stranded in Samoa

High school athletes' return flight to Hawaii was canceled Friday because of a cyclone

By Rosemarie Bernardo
ernardo@starbulletin.com

A group of Hawaii high school football players hun-

Afghanistan ratifies postwar constitution

Women and all ethnic groups win recognition as equal citizens in a democracy under Islam

By Carlotta Gall
New York Times

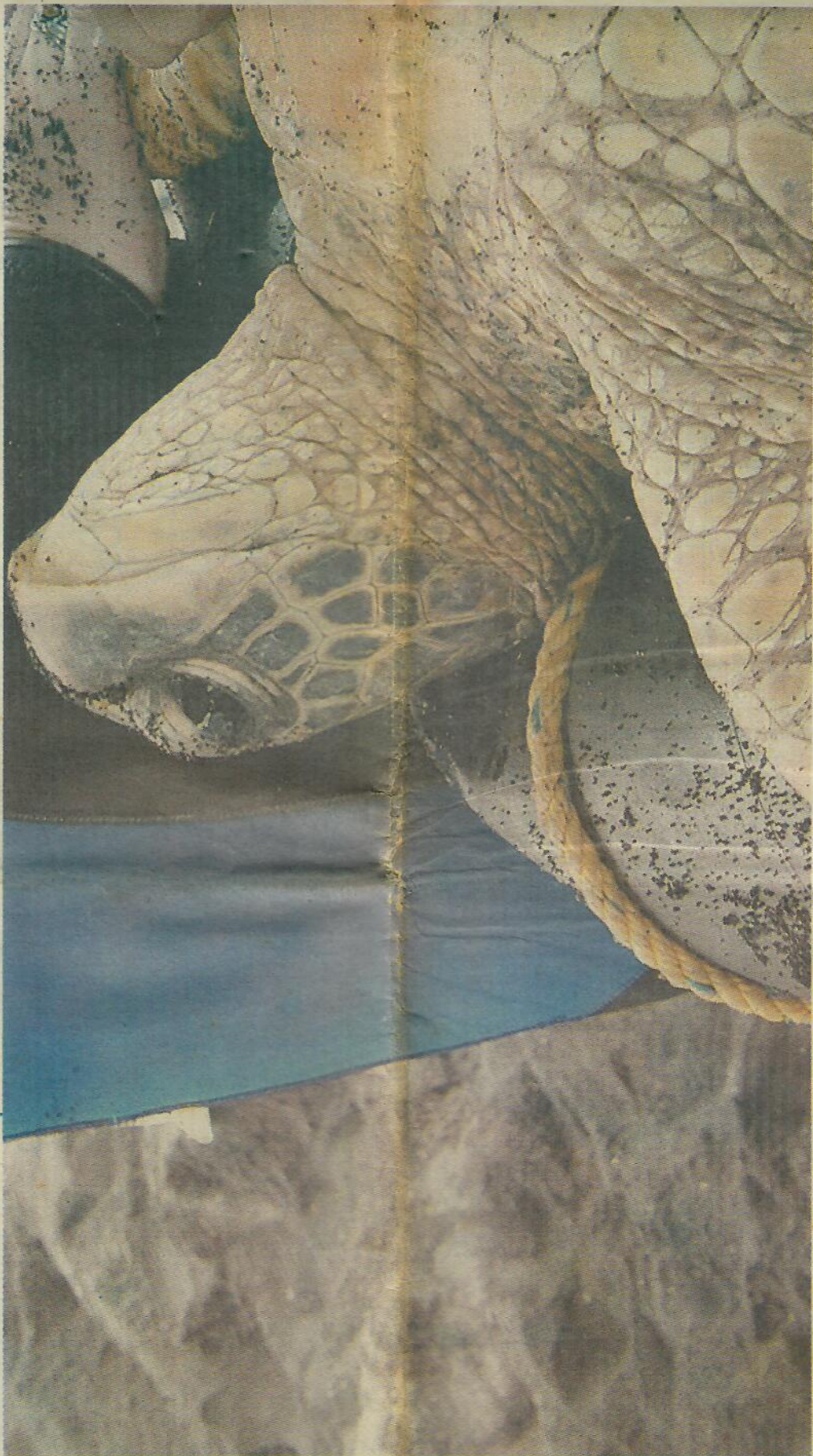
KABUL, Afghanistan >> Delegates at a national meeting approved a new constitution for a quarter-century of war.

"There is rain coming, and flowers are growing from my body," said the chairman of the grand council, Sebaghatullah Mojadeddi, reciting a poem. "I am so happy the ending is so pious and beautiful," he said, his voice cracking as he apologized for any fallings in the result.

Delegates said parliamentary elections likely will follow

within six months after the presidential vote. An independent judiciary is also being organized. And in a carefully balanced wording, the country will be renamed the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, combining

Please see Afghanistan, A7



DIANA LEONE / DLEONE@STARBUCKET.COM

The Hawaiian green sea turtle, or honu, has been recovering steadily during the 25 years it has been protected by the Endangered Species Act.

COMEBACK

The Hawaiian green sea turtle rebounds from precariously low population levels thanks in large part to a Hawaii researcher

By Diana Leone
dleone@starbulletin.com

The first year Hawaii's green sea turtle expert counted the animals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, he found 67 nesting females at East Island, French Frigate Shoals.

Three decades later, on the same island, George Balazs' research team counted 467 nesting females in a season — a nearly 600 percent increase.

Using additional data from the main Hawaiian Islands and mathematical modeling, Balazs estimates that Hawaii now has as many as 35,000 mature green sea turtles and perhaps 250,000 juveniles age 6 or under.

What a difference 25 years under the protection of the Endangered Species Act can make.

"You ask anybody that's a water person, that lives around the water — there's a definite

Please see Comeback, A6

... yesterday, playing cards and video games as rain, winds and waves from Tropical Cyclone Heta lashed American Samoa.

"We don't even think about it," said Philip Elisara, 17, who plays for Radford High School's Rams.

Football players — 24 from various high schools in Hawaii and two from the mainland — have been stranded in American Samoa since their flight was canceled Friday due to rain and wind from Heta.

The players and their coaches had traveled to the island after Christmas for a week-long cultural visit and a football game on New Year's Day.

Heavy rains pummeled the ground while gusty winds beat against the windows, football player John Reis of Kalaheo High School's Mustangs said in a telephone interview. Reis said he saw trees snapping in the high winds. He added that he was weary of the weather but assured that he is safe at the Pago Airport Inn.

At 8 p.m. HST yesterday, the hurricane was 200 miles west of Pago Pago and traveling southeast at 13 miles per hour, according to National Weather Service lead forecaster Jeff Powell. The cyclone passed about 60 miles southwest of Savaii, an island in the neighboring nation of Samoa, at about 8 last night.

"The peripheral effects are going to be pretty hefty," said NWS forecaster Bob Ballard.

Near the eye of the hurricane, winds have gusted to 196 miles an hour, which would qualify the storm as a Category 5 hurricane, reserved for the most powerful hurricanes. Tropical

Please see Samoa, A7

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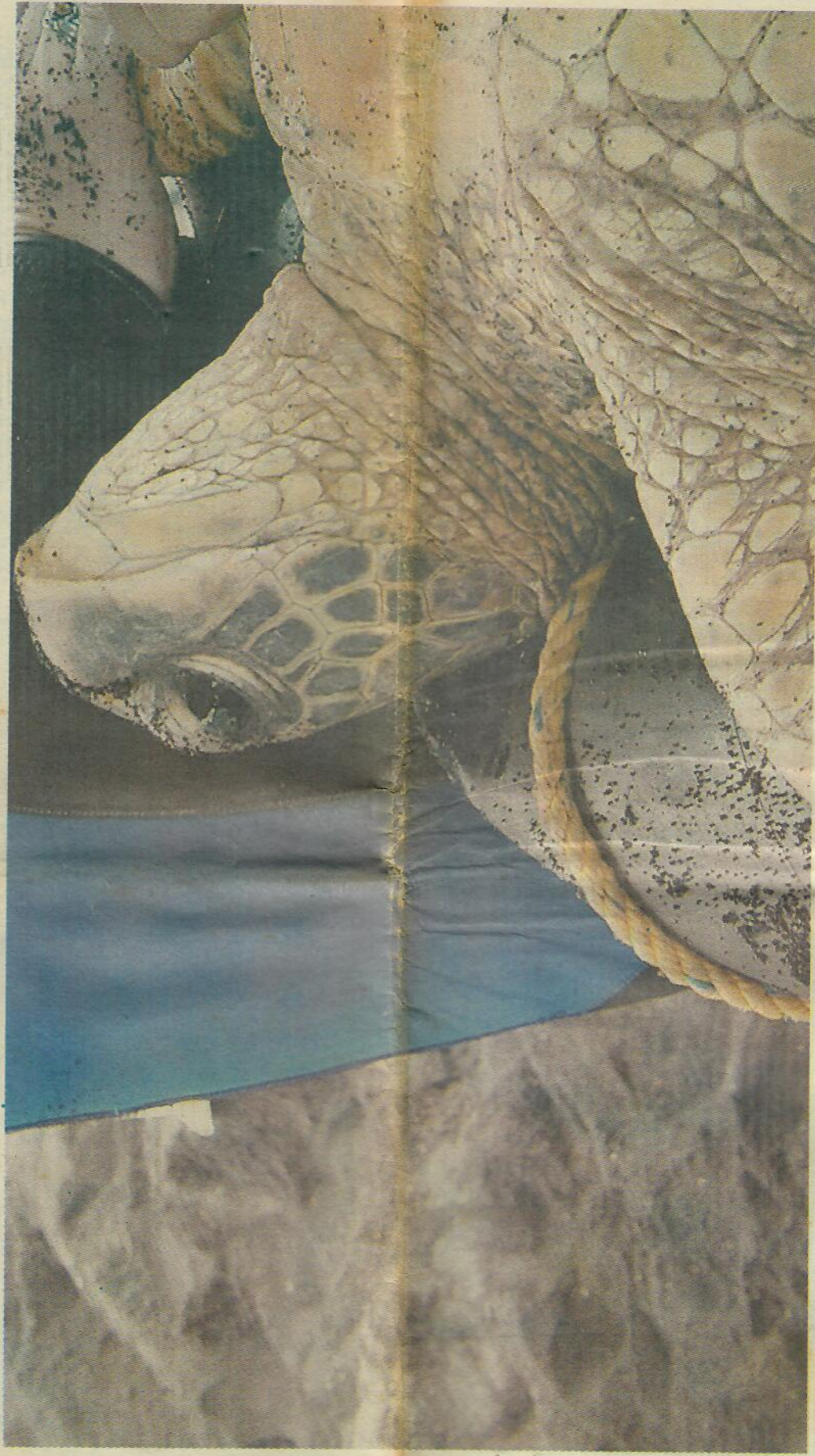
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See Samoa, A7



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Please see Comeback, A6

Over sends back initial pictures of Martian crater

CORKY'S HAWAII

Homeback: The atmosphere at the turtle exam is part science lab, part carnival, with diapers to wipe up spit

Continued From A1

crease in turtles," says Robert Morris, the sole veterinarian contracted by the National Marine Fisheries Service to treat sick and injured turtles worldwide.

The honu's recovery is significant enough that if the trend continues, the Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service might ultimately remove Hawaiian green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) from its endangered-species list.

That step, if taken, would involve public hearings, scientific reviews and time, says Balazs, director of the Fisheries Service's Marine Turtle Research Project in Hawaii.

And during such deliberations, the turtles would have to go to bat for their future — just as he has for 30 years.

Balazs was a self-described "behavior scientist" in 1973 when he first questioned whether people in Hawaii were harvesting honu at a rate faster than the animals could replace themselves.

In his first few years of data collection in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands — where he and his team later live in the main Hawaiian Islands — he and his colleagues go to mate and lay their eggs — confirmed with suspicion.

At the rate people were eating turtle steaks, the risk was high that not enough of the animals would survive to perpetuate the species.

Balazs' original work helped

Balazs says.

Within a few minutes, one of the turtle-catching teams is back with the first patient of the day riding in the inner tube, belly up to the sun. After that, every 15 minutes, a crew pops out of the ocean with another turtle.

"They're definitely stronger than you think," says Ashley Herd, a marine science and art student at UH-Hilo. The turtles captured this day measure up to 2 feet wide. "If they want to get away from you, they're gone."

Using a measuring tape and calipers, Balazs measures the dimensions of each animal. The information will be entered into the massive database that has provided Balazs and others raw material for hundreds of scientific papers over the years.

The turtles seem to bear the indignities of the exam with a quiet patience. Their least favorite part appears to be the mouth exam. Several turtles respond by spitting out seaweed. Balazs wipes up the smelly mess with disposable diapers brought for that purpose and continues.

When the checkup is complete, the turtle gets a blotch of temporary white paint on its shell to keep it from being captured again that day.

The atmosphere on the beach is part science lab, part carnival. Tourists and locals line up behind the plastic caution tapes around the work area to take pictures.



nals would survive to perpetuate the species.

Balazs' original work helped the honu listed in 1978 as a threatened species, which means the potential of up to a 1,000 fine and a year in prison for anyone convicted of harming or killing one.

The man universally considered to be the only person credited with the impact of his work.

It's a one-man show. He's serious and dedicated to honu. It's his life," says Morris. "He's out doing turtle work everywhere. Not only the Hawaiian Islands, but in Japan and all over the world."

A Canadian couple that has been diving with sea turtles during summers on Maui since 1990 and promotes turtle conservation on their "Turtle Trax" website (www.turtles.org) has to say about Balazs:

"Without George, there would likely be no honu. He's contributed enormously to the knowledge of all marine turtles, not just the honu.

There can only ever be one peer researcher — the first to knock a door. Jane Goodall, the chimpanzee pioneer researcher," Ursula Kuiper-Bennett and Peter Bennett said in an e-mail from their winter home near Toronto. "And for me? That's George."

Backup roundup

In mid-November, and Balazs is on his way to Punaluu Black Sands Beach Park for his annual "checkup" of the turtles that live there.

Many turtles as possible will be caught, measured for growth and examined for health problems.

Arriving at 10 a.m., Balazs is joined by professors, staff and students in the University of Hawaii's Marine Option



PHOTOS BY DIANA LEONE / DLEONE@STARBULLETIN.COM

Jonathan Robinson, above right, a student in the University of Hawaii-Hilo's Marine Option Program, helps researcher George Balazs check the health and growth rate of a green sea turtle at Punaluu Black Sands Beach on the Big Island. At left, tourists at Punaluu Black Sands Beach snap photos of a turtle being returned to the ocean after its examination.

How to help a turtle

If you spot what appears to be a sick, injured or dead sea turtle stranded on land, call:

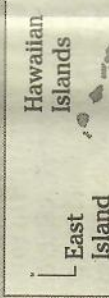
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- >> On the Kona Coast: 881-4200 or 327-4961.
- >> On Kauai: 274-3521.

Or, if a turtle has been killed or harmed, you can call the National Marine Fisheries Service at 541-2727 in Honolulu or toll-free at 800-853-1964.

Green turtles nesting at East Island

Annual trend for 30 seasons

The population of green sea turtles has grown since the animals gained protection under the Endangered Species Act in 1978.



600
500
400
300
200



2002

and study the fibropapilloma tumor disease that has become the turtles' worst enemy now that hunting has been banned. Despite all his professional time spent focused on turtles, Balazs would be excused for trying to get away from them during downtime. But honu occupy his leisure time, too. His destination on a recent vacation was a tour of temples honoring turtles on a small fish-

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They have a canopy set up on the beach, with a sturdy table in its shade, for Balazs to perform his exam of as many turtles as four-person teams of students can bring to him over the next four hours.

The Punaluu study site has been ongoing for more than 20 years. At 19 other locations around the main Hawaiian Islands, Balazs and his staff of 4½ workers team with a variety of volunteers.

"It's people that make programs like this work,"

outs with "frequently asked questions" about what the group is doing to the turtles.

While Balazs and a crew work on one turtle, there are always two "on deck" to be examined. The steady supply contrasts sharply with the 1970s to the '90s, Balazs says, when "we'd be tickled pink if we were able to catch even two, three or four turtles" in a day or night of work.

The missing years

After hatching, sea turtles swim away from land. They don't return to near-shore waters until they've grown from palm size to dinner plate size.

Balazs' research on turtle growth rates in the wild has shown him that a young turtle lives at sea for about six years.

"What they do during the years they are on the high seas is the last great mystery," Balazs says, and the area he'd recommend to anyone starting turtle research today.

He also found that it takes 20 or more years for a honu to reach sexual maturity in the wild. Though they probably don't live to be 100, they do live a long time. How long may only be known when currently tagged turtles are recaptured.

Advances in technology allow satellite tracking of turtles at sea that was impossible a decade ago. The battery-powered transmitters are attached to a turtle's shell using a surfboard repair kit and last several months.

Between 1996 and 2000, Balazs and Fisheries Service colleague Jeffrey Polovina have tracked 40 Hawaiian honu, more than 20 loggerheads and four olive ridley sea turtles.

A young captive-raised honu made history earlier this year, transmitting its location during a nine-month, 3,000-mile swim around the Hawaiian Islands.



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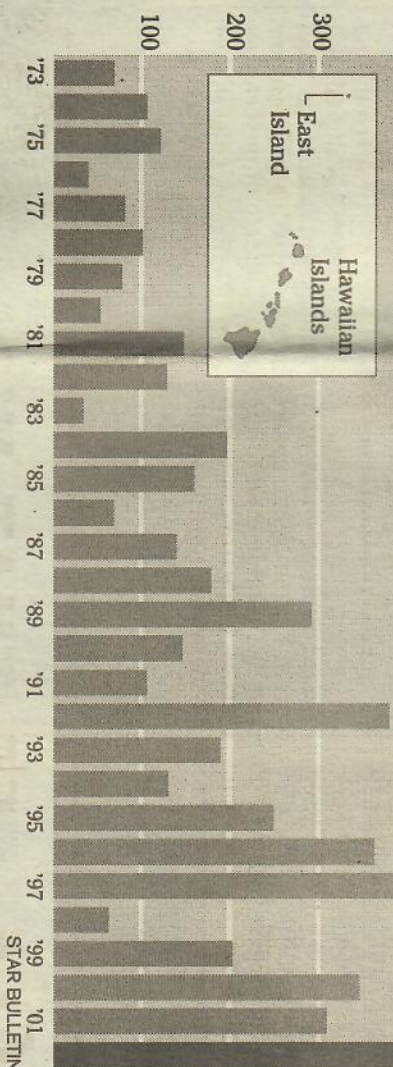
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Such information could eventually lead to guidelines for longline fishing boats that would help them avoid ocean areas where juvenile turtles congregate, Balazs says. Balazs is tracking 27 loggerhead turtles off Japan, three

loggerheads off Taiwan, three green turtles off Hawaii and eight loggerheads off California.

At East Island — the starting point of his turtle research career — Balazs mounted a "Turtle Cam" last year that scans the 12-acre island from atop a 65-foot pole, providing him with photos and video of turtle behavior dawn to dusk.

Balazs and company also head a network that responds to sea turtle strandings (alive or dead) on all the main islands and study the fibropapilloma tumor disease that has become the turtles' worst enemy now that hunting has been banned.

Despite all his professional time spent focused on turtles Balazs would be excused for trying to get away from them during downtime. But honu occupy his leisure time too. His destination on a recent vacation was a tour of temples honoring turtles on a small fishing island between mainland China and Taiwan. One of his hobbies is photographing, with permission, people's honu tattoos.

One day, he noticed a woman posing a baby on a blanket near a basking sea turtle at Lanikai on Oahu's North Shore, then taking a photograph. The woman told Balazs that she's been taking monthly portraits of her child with a honu as background.

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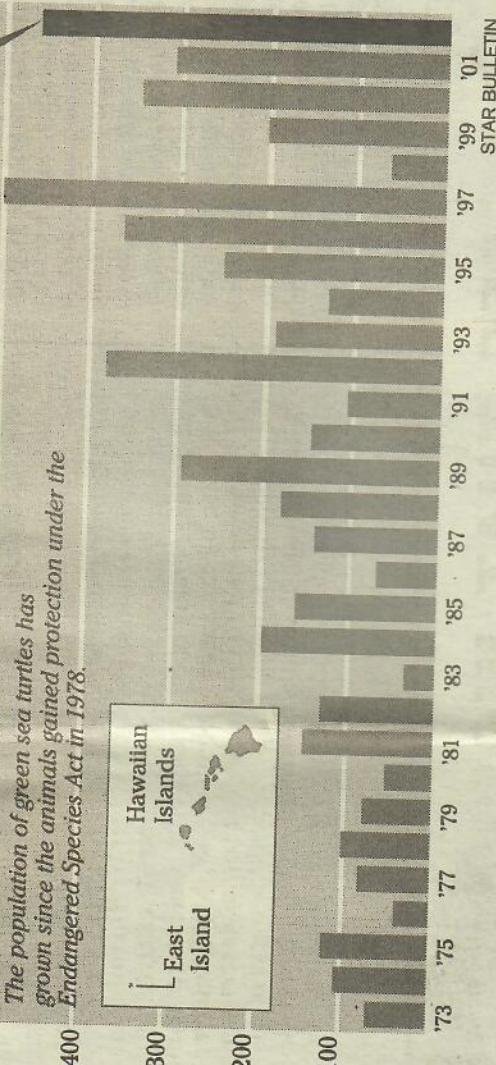
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