

Sea Life Park releases 2 young honu

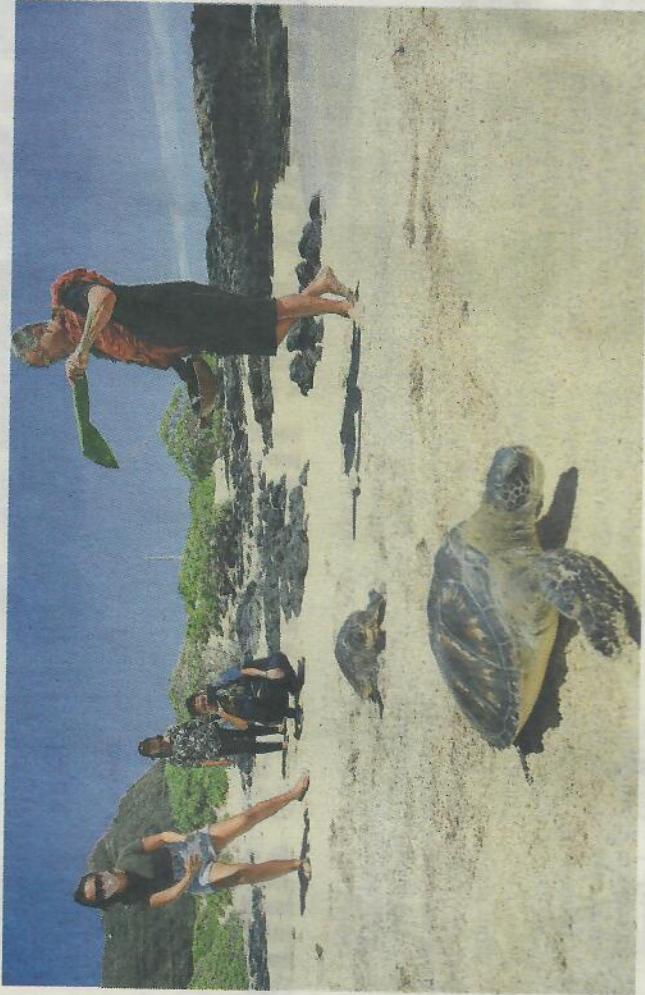
By Mindy Pennybacker
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Honu, the Hawaiian green sea turtle, is in the midst of its summer nesting and hatchling season and, in celebration of National Sea Turtle Day on Wednesday, two young honu were released into the wild at Waimanalo's Kaupo Beach, across the street from Sea Life Park, which has been breeding the endangered species since the 1970s.

After a blessing by Kahu Blaine Kia, the 2-year old turtles, Holokai (Seafarer) and Aheaha (Gentle Breeze), were placed on the sand and made their way quickly into the sea.

"They scampered right down the beach to the water, without hesitating," said Jeff Pawloski, curator for Sea Life Park's animals, adding that, once they reach this age, young honus' odds of growing to adulthood in the wild are about one in four, whereas tiny honu hatchlings only stand a 1 in 1,000 chance of surviving the 20 years to maturity.

For this reason, he said, while Sea Life Park typically releases upward of 800 to 900, day-old hatchlings a year, it also raises a couple dozen from each crop, to be added to the park's programs and loaned to the Waikiki Aquarium, Maui



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Kahu Blaine Kia, right, said a pule (prayer) Wednesday as two sub-adult green turtles — named Aheaha and Holokai — made their way toward the ocean at Kaupo Bay Beach Park in Waimanalo.

tection under the Endangered Species Act in 1978, and in the past two decades their population has increased 5.4% per year, with almost 800 females nesting annually.

However, they remain endangered because of their small, isolated population, and because 96% of nesting occurs at a low-lying atoll in French Frigate Shoals, in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands, which is threatened by climate change.

Still, the good news is that Hawaiian green sea turtles are making "an enormous comeback," Pawloski said, but because honu are appearing at more and different beaches than usual, "now the normal beachgoer

needs to know they're nesting, and the babies pop up at night," and to be on the lookout for keep-away signs and cordoned-off nesting areas.

Other endangered sea turtles found in Hawaii include the 'ea, or hawksbill turtle, the loggerhead turtle, leatherback turtle and Olive Ridley turtle.

nests, and to refrain from moving, touching, or approaching turtles in the wild, and to observe the three Rs of reducing, recycling and reusing plastics."

Indigenous Hawaiian green sea turtles were plentiful throughout the islands before westernization and their commercial harvesting began in the 19th century, Hawaii Marine Animal Response reports on its website.

Honu populations are measured by the annual number of nesting females, only 35 of which were found in Hawaii in 1973. Harvesting was banned with their pro-

Then there is the stress and sometimes harm caused to turtles by people on the beach and in the water who want to play with them, Pawloski said, noting that while the 2-year-old honu are pretty resilient, the park avoids releasing them "in areas where there's high fishing traffic or a lot of people around, because of the reality of negative interactions."

At Sea Life Park or its partner venues, "they get to see and touch a turtle, which is invaluable, while they are taught to remind to be mindful of potential turtle

moonlight on the sea and head inland to perish.

Aside from natural predation by sea birds, large fish, and alien land species such as mongoose, green sea turtles are killed by loss of

beach nesting habitat due to sea walls and other development, being caught illegally or as bycatch in fishing gear, by ocean pollution and entanglement in marine debris, ingestion of plastic bags they mistake for jellyfish, and being struck by vessels, according to the website of National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries.

Ocean Center, the Kahala Resort and elsewhere for the purposes of educating the public about the species' behaviors, its role in maintaining healthy oceans, and the need to protect it.

Educating people is crucial, Pawloski said, as human activity is what primarily threatens the green sea turtle's survival in Hawaii and worldwide.

In nature, honu hatch in buried nests on the beach by night and dig their way to the surface, where many are immediately devoured by predators, while some mis-



More photos plus a video are available at staradvertiser.com.