

# The HONU Whisperer

Summer 2021

## ***2021 Board of Directors***

Kylie Emily—President

Don Porter—Vice President

Lolita Ayala—Treasurer

Tammy Tootell—Secretary

Debbie Herrera—VEC & Board Member

Kelly Hardy—Board Member

Tim Wesely—Board Member

## ***Contact Info***

[www.malamahonu.org](http://www.malamahonu.org)

malamanahonu1999@outlook.com

[www.facebook.com/malamahonu](http://www.facebook.com/malamahonu)

Instagram: malamanahonu

## ***Important Numbers***

### **Stranding Line**

24HR sightings/Emergencies

888-256-9840

### **Debbie**

808-388-9778

kuiipo4kc@yahoo.com

## **In this issue....**

We are officially in the throes of summer and the visitors have returned along with a plethora of honu. Mandates are lifting and it would seem we are approaching a “new” normal. Nesting is in full swing as well with a record number being spotted by volunteers. We humans may have hated the covid quarantine life but our turtles seem to have loved our absence. Stay tuned for future information on Oahu’s 2021 nesting.

As for this issue of The Honu Whisperer, we will feature a return to our Ohana section with three features, Zoe, Bianca, Kelly and an unfortunate goodbye from the Walsh family.

Former president Joe Murphy has written us a great article on Hao and her return to basking complete with stats. We also have a new recurring feature from a former volunteer, Lindsay Feltz and unfortunately we

A big thank you to all the volunteers and here's to a great summer!

# Honu Spotlight: Hao

by Joe Murphy

Those Guardians who were around in late 2010 knew her as Hao`okanaka, named so to honor surfer Andy Irons (i.e. Ironman) upon his untimely death. This was Malama na Honu's first lesson in not conferring gender-based names on subadult turtles\*. When the NOAA science team declared L-28 a maturing female in 2012, action had to be taken. With the most popular alternative also the name of a medieval torture device, it was finally decided to just shorten the name to Hao (Iron).



From the beginning of Hao's tenure at Laniakea, she was a prolific basker. She averaged almost 10 appearances per month over the first few years. Her first officially recorded visit to the beach began on September 13th, 2010 at 2:10 pm. She basked 7 more times that month and for the next 4 years (12-month spans from September -August 2010/11, 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14) she basked 118, 149, 107 and 103 times respectively. No turtle other than Brutus basked more during that period of time...or since!

Basking on over 100 occasions in a year is a truly rare occurrence. While Brutus did it every year records were kept (even exceeding 200 appearances once), besides Hao, the only other honu to have ever achieved this feat were Kuhina (2011, 2012 and 2014), Olivia-Dawn (2011 and 2012) and JP (2016).

When Hao would haul out, she didn't have a very friendly attitude or reputation amongst the other members of the `ohana. She was constantly biting the tails and flippers of other turtles on the beach, usually causing them to give up the area they'd staked out and many times ultimately resulting in the recipients of the rude behavior returning to the water earlier than they'd intended. She even chased some turtles around the beach even when they moved away. It was rare that any

of her contemporaries fought back though one day when she crept up on an apparently unimpressed subadult version of JP, her nibbling resulted in a virtual sandblasting right in her face that quickly ended the encounter. (Pictured left)

On September 5th, 2015, a little after two in the afternoon, Hao hauled out of the water in seriously bad condition. NOAA officials determined that she'd been struck by a boat that had done severe damage to her carapace and which could have also resulted in internal injuries not immediately apparent. Antibiotics were administered and dental epoxy was used to patch up her shell and she was returned to the water at Laniakea several days later. Malama na Honu volunteers were asked to pay close attention to the movement of her rear flippers whenever she would exit or re-enter the ocean for a while as awkward movements or trouble getting on the beach could indicate possible spinal injuries. Thankfully, no additional problems were ever observed and over time, her shell began to heal nicely. (Pictured right)

In regard to her nesting history, we have nothing on record! Of course, that doesn't necessarily mean she has

never gone to nest. In 2012, NOAA estimated her age to be around 30, so she's close to 40 now and well within the age range when Green Turtles reproduce. Before her boat accident, she basked frequently enough for us to be certain (from her lack of absences during the appropriate time period) that she never migrated. Since then, she hasn't basked enough during a year to make that determination strictly from basking records. Also, not being verified by NOAA doesn't mean she has never trekked to the French Frigate Shoals. Only about half of the population of Greens ever nested at East Island before it was destroyed and that was the only island that was closely monitored. We know that Mana and Missy both nested elsewhere, so Hao could just be doing it outside of NOAA's monitoring range.

Since shortly after the accident (9/5/2015), Hao has become a very infrequent basker. Within a few months of her injuries, she began a 9 month hiatus from hauling out at Laniakea. Then she commenced a 14-month absence shortly after her return from that sabbatical and more recently had been away from Laniakea for 31 months. Over this entire period of time (5 years, 11 months) she basked a total of 15 times. While others too have taken a hiatus lasting for more than a year at a time, no other turtle has ever been away for over 2 1/2 years and returned. Yet...



# Honu Spotlight continued...

## SHE'S BACK! HAO HAS RETURNED TO LANIAKEA!

Returning to a shocked but overjoyed welcome by Malama na Honu Volunteer Coordinator Debbie Herrera, Hao hauled out for the first time since September 5th, 2018 (when she had stayed past sunset) on May 4th of this year at 1:26 pm. (and again, stayed past sunset).

Even more exciting for the future, she has also continued to haul out regularly since May 4th, visiting the beach 22 more times throughout May. Her 23 beach visits in May 2021 are the most times in any single month Hao has ever hauled out at Laniakea, a milestone which also pushed the 'Ohana's monthly total for May basking to over 100 for the first time since May 2019 (unless, of course, that also happened last year when Malama na Honu was

legally barred from the beach and was unable to record those basking occurrences...we'll never know for sure).

Malama na Honu hopes that Hao will settle in here again as in the past and join our newest member named just this month, Kanoa (L-35), for many years to come of delighting visitors from all over the world to the sight of huge Green Sea Turtles calmly basking in the sun at our beach.



Hao with Kanoa



Hao

## \*Subadults and Gender

Malama na Honu had a second encounter with the need to change a gender-based name bestowed on a subadult. On April 13th, 2013, Clawdette, a honu thought to be an adult female and so named, disappeared from Laniakea and did not return for 11 months (April 13, 2013-March 28, 2014). When HE returned to the beach, sporting a growing tail, it was obvious that a name change was necessary! This gave the Board the opportunity to rename the turtle Keoki (George in Hawaiian) to honor

George Balazs, the single person most responsible for saving the Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle from extinction. When seeking to likewise honor Joanne Pettigrew, Malama na Honu's founder, by naming the first new turtle to appear in 2015 after her, we chose "JP," a gender-neutral name in case the turtle turned out to be a male. Validating the adoption of this policy, the exact situation has come to fruition this year, as L-29 now has a noticeably growing masculine tail!

# ZOOKEEPER

## Tales

by Lindsay Feltz



Hey Honu Guardians, my name is Lindsay and I volunteered with Malama na Honu from 2016-2019. Working on Laniakea Beach was one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had and I miss the honu very much. I even got one tattooed on my foot! Now, I live on the mainland and work with some very different animals that I'd like to share with you. I work as a zookeeper at the Caldwell Zoo in east Texas. It's pretty different from beach education, but it's another way of protecting species and educating the public about the animals around us.

In each issue I'll highlight a different animal I work with. This month, it's the meerkat! Meerkats are small members of the mongoose family weighing

in between 1-3 pounds. If you've seen the Lion King, Timon is a meerkat! They live in the deserts of southern Africa in social groups called mobs. Mobs can have up to 30



or 40 members and are matriarchal – a female is in charge and produces most of the offspring. They are excellent diggers and live in large underground burrows. One of my favorite fun facts about this species is that they are immune to the venom of many snakes and scorpions! Thankfully, meerkat populations in Africa are not in danger. We hope to keep it this way by educating people about them and reminding them that meerkats do not make good pets.



At Caldwell Zoo we have two mobs, each with an alpha female. We make sure that each group stays busy with enrichment items. Enrichment is anything that stimulates natural behaviors. Some of the meerkats' favorite items to interact with are rotten logs, forage

boxes, forage tubs with plastic balls, leaf piles, and pretty much anything else that has their favorite food (mealworms) hidden inside. Enjoy some meerkat pictures, and see you next issue with a new species to spotlight!



You can find more information on the Caldwell Zoo on the following platforms.

[www.caldwellzoo.org](http://www.caldwellzoo.org)

Facebook  
@CaldwellZoo

Instagram  
@caldwellzoo

# Malama na Honu Ohana

## Intern Zoe

Deb, Zoe & Don



I started my internship at Malama na Honu with no real qualification to care for sea turtles besides Debbie's vote of confidence. I knew nothing about honu besides how mesmerizingly magical they can be and how terribly endangered they are. Having worked many hours a week with Malama na Honu since December, I can now answer almost any obscure honu query imaginable. From the mundane reliable question of "When will the turtles come out?" to the obscure, "Are the internal organs along the top of the shell?" I've answered nearly every question in the book.

There were many facets of the internship that almost couldn't happen because so much waited on hiatus at the start of 2021 due to coronavirus. Sea Life Park, classrooms, and NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), all being closed to the public in January. This meant we had to find other ways to get involved in outreach. We — instigated by Amber Keener — acknowledged that a large part of our Malama na Honu ohana is military, so we decided to instruct a group of homeschooled military kids for a beachside field trip. The group came to the turtles' beach early in the morning to participate in a trash cleanup along the shore, and then we reconvened for a lesson on marine

Similarly, I also lead multiple virtual field trips for elementary schoolers over Zoom. One was Dr. Suess themed so we read Yertle the Turtle and dressed up with crazy hairdos for Wacky Wednesday. Another virtual field trip was more focused on marine debris and environmental damage in relation to turtles. I was surprised by how excited the kids were to learn about the honu, especially considering that it was over Zoom. My title as intern also included leading many new volunteer orientations throughout the months, telling prospective volunteers about our group's role as honu guardians.

As things have begun to return to normal, more has become possible for me to do with the internship. Sea Life Park opened back up over Earth Day weekend, so we went for three days to do honu outreach in person. For the event, I made a honu scale coloring page for children to learn about turtle identification. Each scale pattern is unique to the individual turtle, like a fingerprint, so we tell them apart by looking at their face scales. For the activity, I drew a blank side of a honu head so that the kids could color in a unique scale pattern. Some of the younger kids' "scales" were more interpretive drawings than they were scales, but regardless, all of them seemed to have fun coloring and began to learn about the unique "face fingerprints" of turtles.

Most recently, I've been able to join the nesting team for the very beginning of

nesting season. This entails patrolling various beaches early in the morning looking for the signs of a nest. I've learned how to use two different scientific apps where all of the nesting data of honu beach activity is tracked on a map over the course of the season. So far, I haven't found any nests on my beaches, but I have encountered the same basking female honu a few times, and I've seen many swimming in the water along shorelines eating limu.

Even with all the fun of outreach events, my favorite part of the internship still must be all the time I spend on the beach getting to know other volunteers and our honu. Just like people, the

Zoe at Sealife Park



turtles all have their own personalities, stories, and tell-tale behaviors. Even without ID-ing her, I can recognize Olivia-Dawn when she goes up to another basking honu and nips at them out of nowhere, crowding their personal space. I know I see Kanoa, our newest addition to the honu ohana, when I see a tiny dark shadow hauling out of the water right as I thought I might be able to leave the sunset shift a little early. I was lucky enough to be on the beach the day Hao decided to come back to Laniakea for the first time in three years. She returned healthy and surprisingly, almost as massive as 70-year-old Mana. I always

Zoe & Bianca



debris and the honu. We discussed honu anatomy, behavior, and history with the help of visual aids and a model turtle.

# Malama na Honu Ohana continued...

look forward to seeing JP, our newly declared male honu, haul out on the beach with his girlfriend Olivia Dawn. Or to see Hiwahiwa, the 570-foot deep dive record holder, and Keoki, formerly known as Clawdette for his claw-shaped flipper. Interning with Malama na Honu has been the most rewarding and unconventional educational experience I've ever had. I've

learned an incredible amount from all the volunteers on the beach and all of our coworkers at NOAA and Fish and Wildlife. This experience has been more than I could have imagined, and I truly cherish all of the friendships I've made with the volunteers. The kindness and welcoming spirit that everyone at Malama na Honu shares has meant the world to me, and

it is an attitude I will carry with me in my life beyond this beach. I am forever grateful for all of the opportunities I've had with this group and I truly hope to return again soon either as a visitor or a more permanent volunteer on the island. Thank you Malama na Honu!



Sealife Park Outreach



## Intern Bianca

Aloha Malama na Honu! My name is Bianca Falcone and this spring I was an intern with Malama na Honu. I am a high school graduate from Wellesley, Massachusetts and decided to take a gap year in order to pursue different interests and gain life experience before college. As I am interested in marine biology and education, working with Malama na Honu has been a remarkable experience to dive into both career options.

Moving to the North Shore in February, I instantly felt welcomed and at home with the Malama na Honu family. Volunteers were thrilled to answer questions about the Honu and walk me through the process of recording basking data. I am extremely grateful for the training I received, the wonderful people I met while volunteering, and the lasting connections I have made.

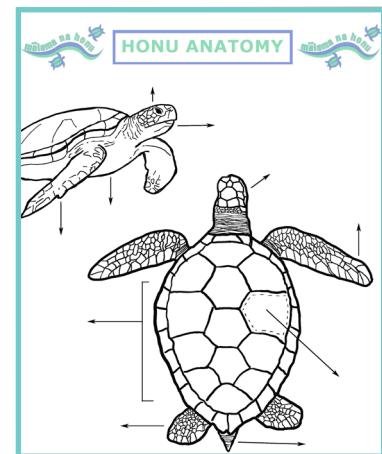
In my time with Malama na Honu my

Deb & Bianca



favorite experience has been working with children, doing educational outreach with local elementary schools, girl scouts, and homeschool groups. It is inspiring to see young minds so passionate about protecting our marine life. Through beach clean ups, turtle anatomy lessons, and storytelling, seeing the kids' excitement and curiosity about the Honu furthered my curiosity and pushed me to think on a more creative level. After having learned details about Green Sea Turtle anatomy, I was excited to create a visual aid that stimulates children's artistic abilities and

extends the lesson plan. I wanted to create something to capture their enthusiasm and help further their knowledge of the Green Hawaiian Sea turtles so I created a coloring page diagram of the Honu anatomy. (Pictured below)



I look forward to continuing my passion for marine life and education in the future and hope to return to the North Shore to experience the height of nesting season!

## Kelly Goodale

While working on my undergraduate degree in Wildlife Sciences at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, I remember adults asking what I was going to do with that degree. I would always give the cheeky response, “to save the world” but in reality, I did not have a clue where I would end up. I remember applying for dozens of internships and jobs the summer after graduation. If I recall correctly, I only got one call back for an intern position at Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge (NWR).

Pea Island NWR is located on the north end of Hatteras Island, a coastal barrier island that is part of a chain of islands known as the Outer Banks located off the coast of North Carolina. As a kid, my family would vacation here, and I could not be more excited for the opportunity to work at a place that I had such fond memories of.

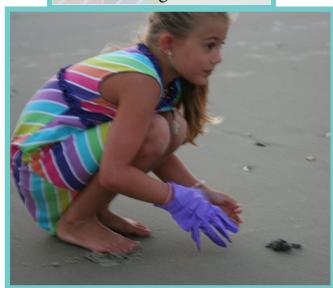
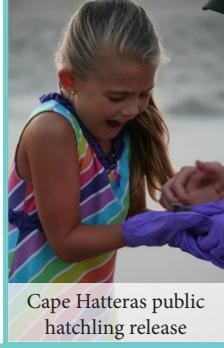
Pea Island is a remote 13-mile stretch of beach with a road that would easily get taken out during winter storms. In the middle of the refuge were a small visitor center, bunkhouse, and office with the nearest neighborhood over 6 miles away. I arrived at the end of August 2009 and was immediately captivated by the nesting loggerhead turtles. I monitored nests at night for hatching and would keep the ghost crabs away from hatchlings trying to make it to the



Emerging Loggerhead-Pea Island

ocean. After a nest hatched, I assisted the biologist with nest excavations to determine hatching success. From this experience I was hooked and my direction in life homed in on working with turtles. It took just over a year bouncing from seasonal jobs before I got offered a biological science technician job at Cape Hatteras National Seashore (NS).

Cape Hatteras NS is also located on the Outer Banks and is on either side of Pea Island NWR. To say this was a dream job is an understatement. For three years I worked on monitoring turtle nests and nesting shorebirds



along 26 miles of coastline. Throughout the years, nesting turtles increased from 150 nests/year to over 250 nests/year. Since Hatteras is a popular vaca-

tion spot for off-road vehicles and most families rent beach houses; we had our fair share of balancing public use and conservation of threatened and endangered species. Turtle work largely consisted of installing small closures to protect nests followed by larger ones blocking out artificial lights once the nests reached the hatching window. Like Pea Island, we monitored nests for hatching and conducted nest excavations. One of my favorite parts of this work was sharing it with the local community and visitors. Since most nests occurred on popular beaches and in the front of small towns throughout the seashore, we would invite the public to turtle excavations and hatchling releases.

After a few seasons at Hatteras, I embarked on my next adventure, working with threatened and endangered seabirds in Hawaii. It was bittersweet to leave Hatteras, but I was excited for the next chapter in life. I spent several years focusing on monitoring native seabirds and invasive species removal at Haleakalā National Park and Midway Atoll NWR. In the fall of 2019, I got wind of a position at James Campbell NWR on the North Shore of O‘ahu. At the time, I did not realize I would quickly fall back to my roots and get the opportunity to work with sea turtles again. Seeing the two-mile stretch of beach, I was excited for the handful of turtle nests that we might get in the summer of 2020. Like most things in 2020, it was far from normal and there were a record number of nests throughout O‘ahu including James Campbell NWR. I worked closely with Mālama na Honu and U.S. FWS Coastal Program on monitoring beaches, documenting nests, and patiently waiting for them to emerge. It was an exciting,

# Malama na Honu Ohana continued...

whirlwind of a season however, it did not come without challenges. Many of the challenges we faced on O'ahu was very similar to those I experienced at Cape Hatteras which includes dogs off-leash, light pollution, bonfires, vehicles and people going over nests, and mammalian predators. The underlying issue for many of these is people. It is a sad reality however it is one we can work together on changing. During

the off-season, I worked with Mālama na Honu on developing outreach material for beach-goers and property owners. Brochures, light switch covers, and stickers were developed and are being distributed to the community and visitors. We are excited to see honu returning to these islands and we are hopeful that nesting will increase across the islands which also provides unique opportunities to connect peo-

ple to Hawaii's native species. To help us, you can refrain from having bonfires on the beach from May 1 to December 1, keep dogs on a leash, turn outdoor lights off at night or have turtle-friendly lighting, close your blinds and curtains in the evening, use a red light while on the beach at night, properly dispose of garbage and fishing line, and remove all recreational equipment off the beach at night.

## Help us protect nesting sea turtles



### May-November

- ★ Turn off outside lights after dusk.
- ★ Close blinds and curtains.
- ★ Remove recreational equipment(chairs umbrellas, etc.), fishing gear, and other personal items from the beach.
- ★ Do not have beach fires, hatchlings are attracted to the light and may go into the fire.
- ★ Properly dispose of garbage, turtles can mistake plastic for food or become entangled it

## Encountering a turtle at night

- ★ Observe turtles from at least 10 feet away
- ★ Please do not feed, harass, or touch
- ★ Do not use flash photography
- ★ Do not use headlamps, use the natural moonlight or a red light
- ★ Stay quiet so you do not disturb
- ★ Report nesting and hatching activity to Mālama na Honu at [malamanahonu1999@gmail.com](mailto:malamanahonu1999@gmail.com)

## Get Involved!

- ★ Visit our website: [www.malamanahonu.org](http://www.malamanahonu.org)
- ★ Follow us on Facebook: Malama na honu Brutus Malama Na Honu
- ★ Follow us on Instagram: Malamanahonu
- ★ You can protect honu through volunteering, adopting a turtle, or donating.
- ★ Mahalo to you and our partners for helping us protect sea turtles!



## Walsh Ohana

### To Malama na Honu with love

As we all know, life is short. Each and every day is a blessing and too often we allow routine to take over, forgetting to make time for ourselves. Volunteering with Malama na Honu has done just that for our ohana. In making a commitment to the organization, we also made a commitment as a family to spend quality time together, unplugged, and it worked. When asked his favorite part of volunteering my son Aiden quickly replies, "The family bonding time". Little did we know that by making time to be a family ours would grow exponentially. Malama na Honu is not a volunteer organization, it is a family. As my daughter Kiersten writes, "Volunteering with Malama na Honu was one of my favorite things that I did on O'ahu. Volunteering allowed me to make new friends and become a public speaker. One of the best friends I made was Bruce, and his dog Brewster. Bruce is like a grandfather to me and one of the kindest people I have met." You see, it is the people that make our organization so strong, so amazing. The time my family has spent on the beach is priceless and I am so incredibly grateful to everyone who has made Malama na Honu what it is today.

Our family came to O'ahu from Canada, as part of a military exchange. While my kids and husband all found their footing with school and work, I was lost...until I was found. About a year into our time here, I met one of



our current board's members, Lolita. I learned of her turtle work and that very week I attended orientation. It was kismet. I have never felt more at peace than I do when I'm on the beach. No matter what is going on, the second my feet hit that sand, all is right in the world. Malama na Honu has given me so much more than I could ever give back. There are no words that could even come close to how much this ohana means to me.

Of course, I can't forget our beloved honu. While Maka Nui graces my name tag, and shoulder for that matter, I can't possibly choose a favorite. Beach goers often look at me like I'm crazy when I say this, and anyone who knows me will likely

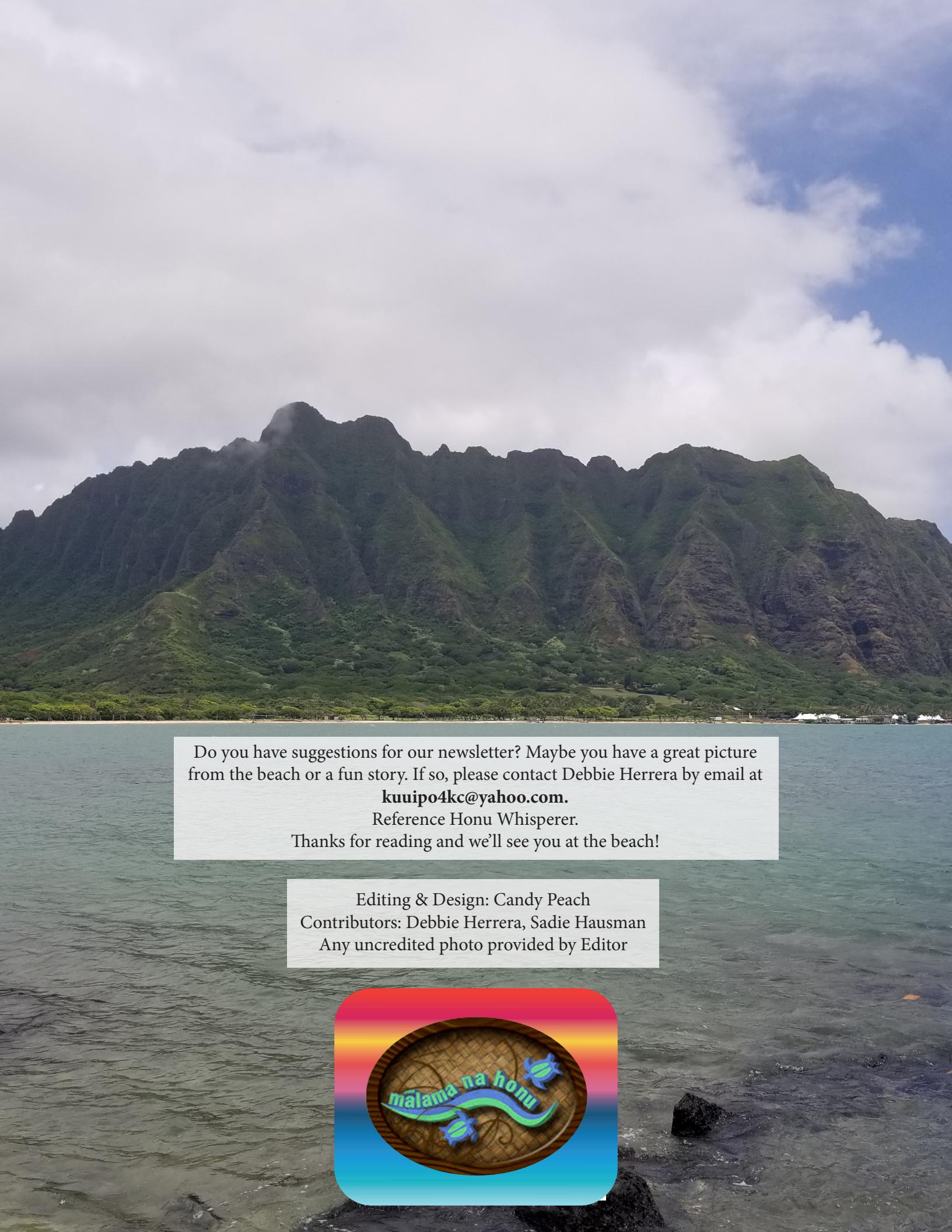
admit it's true, but each of our honu has a personality that is all their own. The drama that is Punahale, the chill nature of Kulihī, the teen angst of Kekoa...I could go on all day. These turtles have become my confidants, they are amazing listeners! "Watching the turtles come in and out of the water is an experience like no other" says my son Noah. "To think of where they have been, and where they are going, it's just amazing." It is heartbreaking to know we will soon have to say goodbye, but I know they will forever remain in our hearts.

I thought this would be easy to write, as Laniakea has provided my family with endless hours of happiness. It was, however, much harder than expected. Then again saying good bye to family is never easy. Ours is led by a true matriarch, one who puts so much time, love and energy into all of us. Deb, this family is strong, this family is proud, this family simply is because of YOU. I will miss all of you, whether I've been lucky enough or not to have been on shift with you, because we are the heartbeat of Malama na Honu.

For those we know personally, please know how much the kindness, love and time you have spent with our family means to us. You have all left a stamp on our lives, and hearts.

A hui ho,  
The Walsh Ohana





Do you have suggestions for our newsletter? Maybe you have a great picture from the beach or a fun story. If so, please contact Debbie Herrera by email at [kuuipo4kc@yahoo.com](mailto:kuuipo4kc@yahoo.com).

Reference Honu Whisperer.

Thanks for reading and we'll see you at the beach!

Editing & Design: Candy Peach

Contributors: Debbie Herrera, Sadie Hausman

Any uncredited photo provided by Editor

