

## Sea Turtles at Sea Life Park

Hatch, tag and release programs such as the one at Sea Life Park Hawaii hope to help the green sea turtle population to continue its recent growth. Every year, anywhere from a few dozen to a few hundred sea turtles hatch at the park. Most are tagged and released into the ocean. Some are held at the park or sent to other qualified wildlife facilities "on temporary loan" with permits from National Marine Fisheries Service (the program's informal advisor) for additional rearing and educational purposes.

## What you can do to help

Sea turtles are **protected** under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Any of the following offenses could result in **one year in prison and a \$50,000 fine**.

- 1) Harassing or trying to ride sea turtles.
- 2) Injuring, killing or keeping sea turtles in captivity. (Special permits allow authorized wildlife facilities to hold sea turtles for scientific and/or educational purposes).
- 3) Buying or bringing any sea turtle products into the U.S.; including meat or shell products.

Report injured or dead sea turtles to:

•National Marine Fisheries  
(808)943-1276 or (808)943-1221

Report suspected offenses to:

•NMFS law enforcement.....(808)541-2727  
•Weekends or Holidays .... (808)587-0077

For concerns or more information contact:

**Pacific Area Office, NMFS,  
2570 Dole St., Honolulu, HI 96822  
(808) 973-2937**

**Sea Life Park Marine Research/Education Foundation  
41-202 Kalanianaʻole Hwy, Suite 7  
Waimanalo, HI 96795  
(808) 259-6476**

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## MAUNA LANI RESORT

### Sea Turtles at Mauna Lanī

The salt water ponds at Mauna Lanī Bay Hotel and Bungalows shelter up to twenty juvenile *honu* - Hawaiian Green Sea Turtles. The tiny youngsters are sent to Mauna Lanī by Sea Life Park Hawaii as part of an experimental species restoration program the Oahu facility is conducting.

By providing a temporary foster home for the young sea turtles from Sea Life Park, the Mauna Lanī community hopes not only to give them a good head start on life, but to help raise public awareness about these engaging sea creatures, the hazards that threaten them, and the efforts being made toward preservation and restoration of the species.

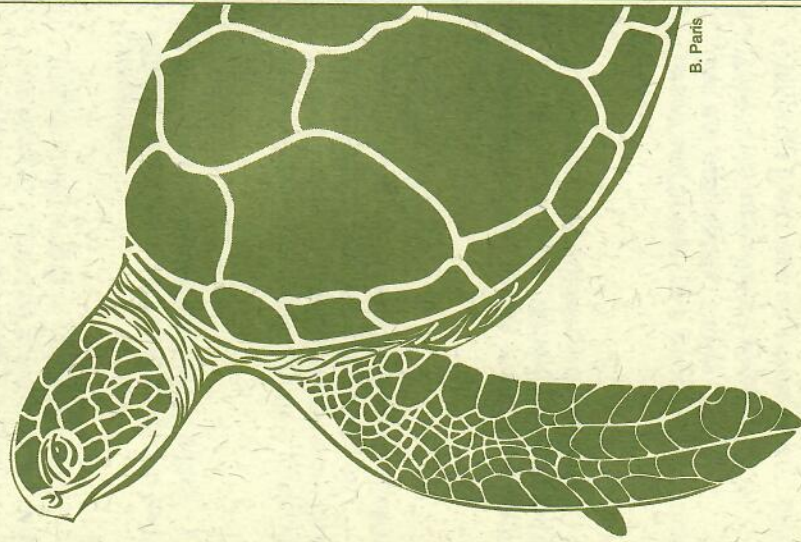
July 4th is "Turtle Independence Day" each year when Mauna Lanī's juvenile honu which are big enough are released into the wild.



Caretaker prepares young *honu* for release.

# Sea Turtles

featuring the Green Sea Turtle  
*Chelonia mydas*  
Hawaiian name: Honu



B. Paris



Sea Life Park Marine Research/Education Foundation



# Natural History

There are approximately 250 species of turtles; only eight of these are sea turtles. Three types of sea turtles are found in Hawaiian waters: the green, the hawksbill, and the leatherback. All species of sea turtles that live in U.S. waters are listed as endangered or threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973.

## GREEN SEA TURTLES IN HAWAIIAN WATERS

### Physical Description

- Green sea turtles are reptiles named for their greenish colored fat. They will grow from a 1 oz hatchling to a 200-500 lb adult with a carapace (upper shell) length of up to 42 inches.

### Longevity

- Green sea turtles may live up to 100 years. Sexual maturity can take 20-50 years.

### Shell

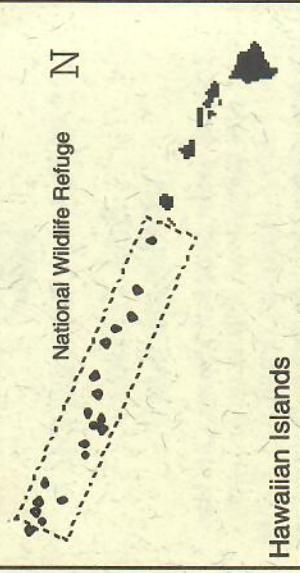
- The shell protects the sea turtle's inner organs. Unable to pull its head and limbs into its shell for protection, the sea turtle relies on camouflage, speed and protective shelter to avoid predators.

### Breathing

- While active, sea turtles surface to breathe every few minutes. When resting, large sea turtles can stay submerged for over two hours.

### Senses

- Green sea turtles have good vision underwater, but are nearsighted above.
- They have an excellent sense of smell.
- Although they have no external ears, green sea turtles are sensitive to very low frequency sounds.



### Activity and Feeding

- Green sea turtles feed on seaweed/algae in water usually less than 35 ft deep.
- Adults often retreat to the underside of ledges or maneuver themselves into deep crevices for extended periods of rest.
- Green sea turtles bask in the sunshine on beaches in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, a behavior special to the Hawaiian Islands.

### Reproduction

- Females are believed to return to lay eggs on the same beach where they were hatched.
- Each may lay between 50 to 150 eggs into a chamber dug into the sand with her hind flippers.
- Then she covers the eggs with sand, and returns to the sea.
- The leathery, round eggs incubate in the warm sand for 50—60 days.
- After incubation, hatchlings take several days to work their way out of the nest and then head for the open ocean. They usually emerge at night to avoid predation and hot daytime temperatures.

### Causes for Mortality

- Young sea turtles have many natural predators—crabs, birds, fish, and sharks. As few as 1 in 1,000 sea turtles may survive to adulthood.
- Humans, however, pose the largest threat to adult turtles.

## Why are sea turtle populations declining?

Conservation efforts during our century are not helping to significantly increase the world sea turtle population for a number of reasons:

**International commerce:** Commercial harvest of turtle meat and turtle nests for eggs is still going on. Skins are used for leather items and shells for ornaments and jewelry.

**Habitat destruction:** Coastal development and pollution affect nesting and feeding areas.

**Poaching:** Stealing sea turtle eggs from the nest threatens the future survival of sea turtle populations.

**Subsistence hunting:** In parts of the Pacific, hunting by native populations is reducing already depleted turtle populations.

**Marine debris:** Recently sea turtles have been found with large amounts of indigestible debris (mostly plastic) in their stomachs.

**Accidental entanglement:** Lost or unattended fishing nets can drown or cause injury to a significant number of turtles.

