

Efforts under way to protect outer

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BY GARY T. KUBOTA

Maui correspondent

Environmentalists and some residents on the neighbor islands are joining to protect the habitat of endangered hawksbill turtles.

There are less than 50 known nesting females in the Hawaiian Islands, most on the Big Island and in Maui County, and they are facing threats to their nesting habitat through urbanization.

Dogs and mongooses also prey

on eggs in nesting areas. The hawksbills' nesting season extends from the end of May through October.

Along the southwest Maui coastline, lights from residences and vehicles scare away nesting hawksbill turtles and confuse hatchlings during migration.

In a southwest section of the Big Island, tour buses and hundreds of visitors daily tramp on a black sand beach at Punaluu, a nesting area for hawksbills.

Some Punaluu residents are

asking the county to close a 100-meter section of road to visitors to prevent the destruction of black sand dunes where hawksbills nest.

Lois Lewis, who lives in Punaluu, said she's seen a hawksbill try to find a nest several times. "The sand wasn't deep enough so she couldn't do it," she said.

Pele Hanoa, whose family has owned land in Punaluu since 1852, says she wants to close the road to visitor traffic and protect the hawksbills from being overrun by tourists.

island hawksbill turtle nesting areas

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"We and the hawksbills have been living there for many years," Hanoa said. "They are so nice to have around. We swim with them."

Federal official Lawrence Katahira, who has been monitoring the hawksbills' nesting patterns, says he feels there's a need for a meeting to discuss improving the habitat while not affecting local businesses.

Katahira said a number of residents rely upon selling souvenirs to visitors to make a living.

He said last summer, two

hawksbills tried but were unable to nest in the Punaluu area. "We need to address everyone's concern," Katahira said.

On Maui, government officials and environmentalists are reminding residents to reduce their lighting during nesting season.

Hawaii Wildlife Fund official Hannah Bernard said residents are being asked to turn their lights away from shoreline and to use blinds in their homes to reduce lights off the shoreline.

Bernard said those who use

lighting to discourage prowlers might consider using motion sensitive lights.

Glynnis Nakai, manager for Kealia Pond National Wildlife Refuge, said more hawksbill turtles are expected to nest this year.

In recent years, volunteers have been helping to build sand fences to restore the dunes fronting beaches near Kealia. In some places, the sand buries the fences.

Nakai said more work needs to be done to stabilize the dunes through growing native plants.

Baby turtles guided to the ocean

More than 70 hawksbill hatchlings on Kihei coastline given assistance

By **CLAUDINE SAN NICOLAS**
Staff Writer

KIHEI — More than 70 hawksbill sea-turtle hatchlings are estimated to have emerged from the Kihei coastline this week, offering promise of the survival of the endangered species.

Volunteers from the community, as well as state and federal officials, collaborated last week to help the tiny hatchlings find their way to the ocean during the early-evening and early-morning hours.

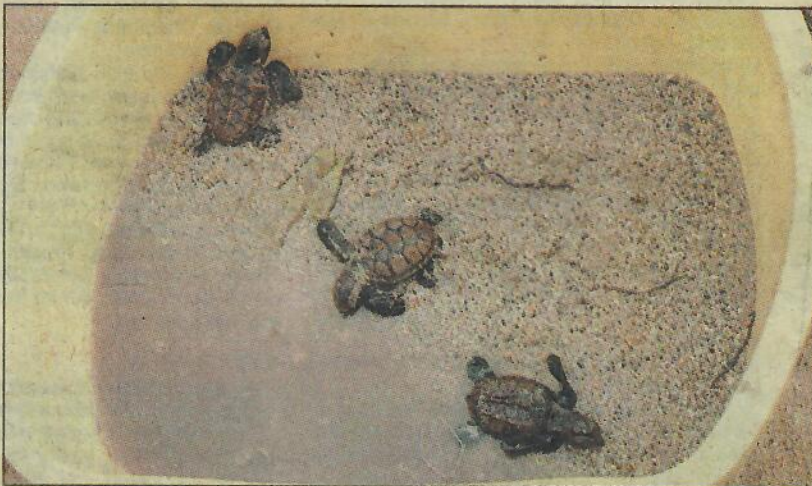
It was the third nest dug up during the 1999 hawksbill sea-turtle nesting season that began in June and is expected to run through early December.

"It's one of the most amazing things to see," said biologist Suzanne Canja of the Hawaii Wildlife Fund's Honu'ea Watch program. "All of a sudden this head pops out of the sand and it's just great."

Steve Williams, coordinator of the "Dawn Patrol" tasked with finding and protecting the hawksbill nests, agreed. "It's very rewarding to see the hatchlings come out and to know you've helped improve the survival of this turtle."

There are still two more nests to be excavated this nesting season, and all five are believed to have come from a female

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Rendering hatchlings help
Wednesday on the Kihei coastline were (from left) Skippy Hau of the state Department of Land and Natural Resources; Steve Williams of the Dawn Patrol; Sam Whitcraft, Allan Ligon and Katy Nicholas of the Hawaii Wildlife Fund; and Barbara Noel of the Dawn Patrol. Seventy-two hours after hawksbill hatchlings emerged from their nest, volunteers excavated the nest to assist any turtles that might have become trapped under heavy sand or in roots.

Hawaii Wildlife Fund
CARRIE ROBERTSON photos

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Hawksbill turtle hatchlings in Kihei guided to the ocean

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currently being tracked by radio and satellite transmitters. She's believed to be at least 40 years old and is about 3 feet long and 2½ feet wide. Tracking systems currently place her in waters off Molokai.

Researchers have named the baby turtles' mother Hokulele, in honor of the shooting stars that accompanied her during her nesting activity earlier this summer.

"She's a very spirited animal. I think this female has a lot more future generations in her; she's great," said Hannah Bernard, education director of the Hawaii Wildlife Fund.

Entities involved in this year's hawksbill-turtle nesting season include the Dawn Patrol, a team of about 25 community volunteers; the Division of Aquatic Resources at the state Department of Land and Natural Resources; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and the Hawaii Wildlife Fund's Honu'ea Watch program.

Bernard said the Fish and Wildlife Service still must confirm the count of the live hatchlings and eggs.

Biologists and volunteers excavated the first nest Aug. 26, finding approximately 186 eggs, half of which produced live hatchlings.

The second nest was excavated Sept. 29, with a 230-egg count. Researchers were unable to come up with an estimate of live hatchlings, according to Bernard, because the nest did not erupt like the others and had less activity.

Canja explained that the nests, which are about 1 to 1½ feet deep, had to be excavated because live hatchlings have died from being trapped beneath undeveloped eggs or in vegetation in the sand.

The nests also are watched closely to make sure predators don't disturb them. One year, a nest was destroyed by dogs.

The endangered hawksbill sea turtle differs from the commonly seen green turtle. Hawksbills are smaller than green turtles and have a distinctive beak.

Green sea turtles nest mostly in the French Frigate Shoals of the Hawaiian archipelago versus the hawksbills, which nest on the main Hawaiian islands. Researchers believe hawksbills live and feed in deeper waters than the green turtle.

Bernard said more volunteers are needed to help monitor and excavate the last two nests. Anyone interested in helping can call 572-7327.