

# The Honolulu Advertiser HAWAII

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## HAWAII'S ENVIRONMENT

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### Students rescue rare turtle from pond

**N**o one knows for certain how long the endangered hawksbill turtle had been trapped inside a large Punaluu pool.

It might have been as long as a year.

The turtle was freed last month from the pool and from a tight band of fishing line wrapped around one of its fins.

It took some patience and a group of students from the University of Hawaii at Hilo to help.

National Marine Fisheries Service researcher George Balasz joined a group of students from the Marine Options Program on Nov. 16 to do research on turtles and search for an animal that had been mentioned as being trapped in a pond.

"Reports said it was tangled with fishing line, or not knowing how to get out. I put 18 students around the pond watching," Balasz said.

The story of the turtle freeing is available, with photos, at [www.turtle.org/kauila.htm](http://www.turtle.org/kauila.htm) on the Web. The main site, [www.turtle.org](http://www.turtle.org), is operated by Peter Bennett and Ursula Keuper-Bennett and dedicated to the protection of turtles.

Balasz said he had expected a green sea turtle, the kind most people see around the Islands. But when the animal surfaced, it turned out to be an extremely rare turtle known in Hawaiian as honu'ea.

He and the students were able to capture the adult female, which had 10 or more strands of monofilament line wrapped tightly around its left front flipper.

They removed the line and checked on an identifying tag the turtle had been fitted with during a nesting attempt in August 1988, when it had been swimming freely in the ocean.

Once the fishing line was removed and another tag was added to improve identification of the animal if it is caught in the future, the turtle was released into the ocean.

Hawksbills grow to about 3 feet long, somewhat smaller than green sea turtles. They feed primarily on sponges. By contrast, green sea turtles are vegetarians, feeding primarily on seaweed.

Hawksbills are at risk from threats including the hunting of the animals for their shells, which are used to make products from combs to cribbage sets. While the shells of other turtles are also taken, the hawksbill has the most intricately figured shells, making them the most valuable.

It is illegal to harm hawksbill turtles or to bring anything made from turtle shell into the United States. Wildlife agencies say there is nonetheless an active international trade in the turtles' shells.

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