



KOKUA LINE

By June Watanabe



Call experts to help sick sea turtles

QUESTION: I know that in Hawaii, it's kind of illegal to touch sea turtles. However, I have seen turtles with tumors on both eyes dying on top of seaweed several times. Am I permitted to touch and help these turtles in any way?

ANSWER: If you see a stranded sea turtle, call the National Marine Fisheries Service at 983-5730, 7 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Friday; or the state Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement at 587-0077 on weekends, holidays and after hours.

The numbers pertain only to sea turtles, which are protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and state wildlife laws. All sea turtles, dead or alive, are protected.

You are asked not to call 911, the Honolulu Police Department, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sea Life Park, the Hawaiian Humane Society or the Waikiki Aquarium.

A stranded sea turtle is defined as an ocean turtle found dead, injured, sick, with a tumor or otherwise abnormal in appearance and out of the water.

You should not touch a turtle unless you are specifically asked to do so by the Fisheries Service or DOCARE.

Be prepared to report exactly where the turtle is, its size, whether it's alive or dead and the extent of its injuries, said Denise Parker, a research associate with the Fisheries Service.

"Then we'll send someone out to pick up the animal," she said. If it's alive, it'll be taken to a veterinarian; if it's dead, post-mortem tests may be done.

If you see someone harming, harassing or killing a sea turtle, call the service's Law Enforcement Branch at 541-2727 or 800-853-1964.

You can also call Mariu Oliphant, president of the non-profit Save the Sea Turtles group, at 638-2211 for information.