

TITLE

An Investigation of the Marine Turtle Populations in the  
Canton Island Area.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

George H. Balazs

INSTITUTION

University of Hawaii, Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology

DURATION

One Year (1973-74)

MOTIVATION

Personal communications with the military commander (Col. Robert Hines) of the SAMTEC facility on Canton Island has revealed that marine turtles inhabit surrounding areas of that island in addition to those of Enderbury and McKlean. Indication has been given that adult females actively nest in relatively large numbers on several sand beaches throughout the year. Hatchling turtles have been observed on occasion around installations, apparently attracted to lights.

All pertinent information obtained on marine turtles present in these areas strongly suggests a healthy, viable population of grazing, breeding and nesting animals. However, no published material presently exists either describing or defining this population. To date no studies have been carried out on these animals.

An investigation of this colony would have special significance at this time due to the fact that all marine turtles, on a world-wide basis, have experienced a drastic reduction in numbers over the past 100 years. This decline has mainly been due to the destruction of highly productive nesting sites and overfishing. Beaches in Bermuda, Cayman Island, and Mauritius, which were at one time sites for large numbers of nesting turtles, no longer function as such due to the encroachment of civilization. Concern by Pacific island nations for the decline in numbers of turtles inhabiting their waters has led to the enactment in recent years of extensive restrictions on the taking of these animals both in the water and on the beaches. In addition, several countries have initiated conservation and education programs dealing with these animals.

Because of the remoteness and lack of habitation in the Canton area, it is critical that this population of marine reptiles be examined, described and defined at the present time. In this way it will be best understood how to protect and perpetuate these animals.

SUPPORT REQUESTED

Initial Reconnaissance Visit

Travel:

Honolulu to Canton Island and return. . . . .	\$ 94.00
Seven days per diem cost . . . . .	42.00
Total. . . . .	\$136.00