

TURTLE TAGGING TIPS FOR LAYSAN AND LISIANSKI FIELD CAMPS

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April 1982

1. The Dupont Lucite spray paint must be applied to a dry carapace and left for at least 5 minutes before the turtle returns to the water. On cloudy cool days, a longer drying period will be necessary. With proper application, paint marks will remain visible for 10-15 days. By carefully approaching a basking turtle from behind by crawling on your belly, the spray paint can be applied without disturbing the turtle. Paint marks of this nature allow individuals to be identified from a distance, instead of repeatedly having to approach, and likely disturb, basking turtles to read their metal tags.
2. Original tagging data for tag recoveries reported from Laysan by Alan Kam on April 14th:
 - 3580 - originally tagged while nesting at East Island, French Frigate Shoals in June 1980; carapace inquiries were present.
 - T265 - originally tagged basking at Laysan in July 1973; straight carapace length was 27.5 in. (Note - important for this turtle to be remeasured since it was still immature in 1973).
3. Turtle tag recoveries, and the dates they are made, should be periodically communicated to Honolulu by radio or letter. This will allow timely feedback of original tagging data, along with special instructions when needed (i.e. T265 of the above). It will also help safeguard against the catastrophic loss of tag data collected, should something like this occur before you return from the field.

4. If at all possible, each turtle should be given at least two tags. For basking turtles, usually two tags cannot be applied at the same time because the turtle will crawl away after the first tag is clipped on. Consequently, the second (and third) tag will have to be applied on subsequent days.
5. When applying tags, they should be immediately inspected to make certain the pointed piercing end is passing through the hole and bent over to lock properly. If it has not locked, it then becomes all the more important to apply additional tags when circumstances permit. No attempt should be made to remove an improperly locked tag - it may stay on the turtle in spite of the deficiency.
6. The circumstances may arise where a tagged turtle will be encountered in which the tag number cannot be read due to corrosion or the tag being deeply imbedded in the flipper. In such cases, it is important to record whatever possible, and apply a new tag (or tags) to other sites on the flippers.
7. The land-basking behavior that occurs in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands is exceedingly rare in the sea turtle world. The tag data you are collecting is very important, but it should not be done at the price of habitually disturbing the turtles so they are frequently returning to the water.
8. When personnel are exchanged between Laysan and Lisianski during June, the remaining turtle tags that you have in stock should stay on the same island. This action will help to prevent possible future mixups relating to the locations where turtles were tagged.

9. In addition to compiling data tables on tag recoveries, new turtles tagged, and turtle censuses, you should also keep some sort of tabular record on the number of new nesting pits excavated and the number of fresh nesting tracks crossing the beach. As we previously discussed, each turtle is liable to dig several false pits (sometimes on different nights) before actually laying eggs. It is therefore important to be able to estimate with some degree of accuracy just how many turtles are nesting on the island.

If your time and energies permit, it would be valuable to tag, and recover old tags, from turtles while they are nesting.