

GREEN SEA TURTLE RESEARCH IN THE
NORTHWESTERN HAWAIIAN ISLANDS
1985 SUMMARY

BY

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Comprehensive monitoring and saturation tagging of nesting turtles on East Island occurred from 11 to 29 June. This was the 13th consecutive year of systematic turtle studies at French Frigate Shoals. A total of 131 females were identified, 50 (38%) of which were long-term tag recoveries. Analysis of these data by Dr. Jerry A. Wetherall indicate that the 1985 nesting population at East Island was 252, about the same number as the 1984 season. A gradual, long-term increase, with 3-4 year cyclic depressions, seems to be taking place. An adult tagged in a foraging pasture at Johnston Atoll in 1983 was recovered nesting on East Island. This is the first evidence of a migratory link between the two locations. Signs of recent shark attack were seen on two adult turtles, a male on Tern Island and a female on East Island. An adult female was found dead on Whale-Skate Island, but the cause of death was not determined. A female nesting on East Island was rescued after trapping herself in buried cable.

Only low levels of nesting were again documented at Pearl and Hermes Reef, Lisianski and Laysan Islands. Counts of "nesting pits" suggest that no more than 20 or 30 females in total were involved at these three locations. No nesting was reported at Kure Atoll or Midway.

Twenty-eight turtles were identified basking and/or foraging at Lisianski during a 1-month study period. At least 11 (5 adults, 6 immatures) had been previously tagged here within the past 6 years. Growth rates of recaptured turtles reconfirmed the slow growth measured during previous years (<1 cm per year).

An adult male fatally struck by a boat and buried at Midway during May 1984 was exhumed in January 1985. Limb bones (humeri) were salvaged and sent to Dr. George Zug at the Smithsonian Institution for further cooperative research on skeletochronological age estimates.

An adult female at Kure Atoll was rescued in June after being found tangled in a scrap of trawl webbing. In July an adult female was sighted basking on Sand Island (Kure Atoll) that had been originally tagged nesting on Lisianski Island in August 1982.

At Pearl and Hermes Reef 38 immature turtles were captured with a scoop net while foraging in shallow algal pastures. Eight were recoveries originally tagged here during 1983 and 1984.