

September 20, 2018

My friends and I were planning to swim from Kapaa Park (North Kohala) northward, about an hour's swim. I was the first one in the water around 8 a.m., and immediately, I noticed a large monk seal in the shallows. He seemed to be standing upright with his head close to the surface and looking rather odd, like he was hiding something. I could tell that he was holding something between his flippers. Curious, I swam closer, and much to my dismay, I saw that he was holding a large Green Turtle between his flippers. I feared what he might do with the turtle so I watched feeling totally helpless. By that time, two of my friends showed up, and we watched in horror as the seal bashed the turtle into the rocks with a mighty force with his two flippers. Then again, he rammed the honu into the rocks. I felt sick to my stomach watching this display. The poor honu seemed lifeless, resigned to trying to escape. Like a frightened animal, he seemed frozen. The seal swam a little further and while still holding the turtle, hideously bit into the honu's neck and shoulder. I thought the seal was going to eat the turtle right there, but he took the honu and swam into deeper water and was no longer visible to us.

We were shocked how savagely the monk seal battered the honu, but we proceeded with our swim. About an hour and a half later, we headed back to Kapaa, and one of the friends saw the seal near the rocks below the pavilion at the park. He was alone, and the turtle was nowhere to be seen. We were afraid that the honu was dead and eaten.

I later asked our local veterinarian, Robin Woodley, if she had ever heard of monk seals killing and eating turtles. She said that she had not heard of them eating turtles, but used the turtles as playthings, toys. She sent me some links to videos of seals "playing" with sea turtles. Perhaps like the way the Orcas of the Pacific Northwest "play" with the seals before killing them.

The thought that the turtle may have already been dead did not occur to me, but after you, George, mentioned that they need to go to the surface to breathe, the monk seal clearly had the honu underwater the entire time I witnessed the ordeal while the seal was able to stick his nose out of the water for a breath.

I will never forget what I saw and how badly I felt for the honu even though this is part of nature, the natural world, and these things happen.

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