

# Life in the Field

Endangered Species Coordinator Eugene Kridler calls it "a young man's game."

He is speaking of fieldwork, the nuts and bolts work of wildlife management, where researchers study animals in native habitats, often contending with miserable weather, primitive living conditions, and solitude, where researchers encounter pigs so wild they are tame, since they know no fear of man.

One such worker is George Balazs, 34, of the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology. His laboratory, though, is no university facility. It is French Frigate Shoals and other remote

islands. His specialty is green sea turtles, and his interest in them has taken him into the field for as long as 3½ weeks at a time.

What is it like, sharing an island with none but seals, turtles and seabirds, the wind and the water?

"I enjoy it," says Balazs. "I'm rarely bored." His waking hours, he explains, are crammed with data-gathering activities, observing turtles basking, nesting, perhaps tagging them, and recording his myriad of observations in a scientific diary.

A recent expedition in collaboration with Causey Whittow of the university's physiology department, was devoted to finding "What happens thermally to turtles. How hot does the shell get? How much of this heat is transferred internally? How do they orient to the sun?" Though this

may sound a bit esoteric, admits Balazs, it has very real management implications, since it can help determine just what sort of beaches are necessary for the threatened green sea turtle to survive.

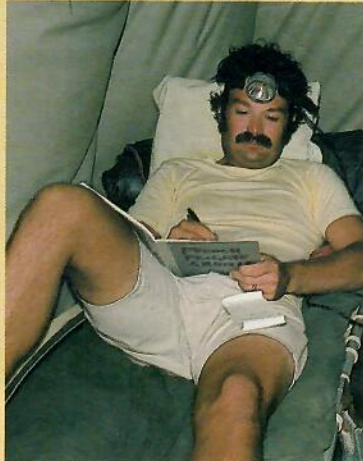
To work effectively, a researcher must learn to co-exist with animals. "Turtles fear the presence of man," says Balazs. "We want to study what they're doing naturally. If we impose influences that alter behavior, we're studying something abnormal."

The loneliness "comes in surges," says Balazs, but a transistor radio brings in KGU, KUI (a Kauai station),

and now and then, by some freak of the airwaves, Salt Lake City.

"There's a lot of life there to keep you company. There are living beings around you, and a lot of them. In a sense I have a feeling of being very privileged. There're many times now I've been to French Frigate Shoals during the breeding season and known that they (the turtles) will be right over that rise. As many times as I've walked up and come over that rise, and have seen for the first time for that particular year, the site with all those old girls lying there, snoozing away . . ."—he searches for the right words—"it's just fantastic. This is one place in the world where those turtles can lie on the beach and no one is going to bother them."

Softly, he adds, "I hope it continues."  
—V.L.



Balazs in tent recording data (photographed with self-timer).