

INFORMATION SUMMARY ON THE VANCOUVER AQUARIUM GREEN TURTLES

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Two green turtle, Chelonia mydas, were returned to Hawaii on March 20, 1986 from the Vancouver Aquarium. The turtles had originally been shipped to Vancouver in 1956 by Spencer Tinker, former Director of the Waikiki Aquarium. They were estimated to measure 45-50 cm in straight carapace length at that time. Transport of the turtles both to and from Vancouver was made courtesy of Canadian Pacific Airlines.

The turtles arrived in Hawaii in excellent condition and have been permanently housed at Sea Life Park on Oahu. Numerous color photos were taken of them on March 25th and April 9th. They were double-tagged on April 9th shortly before being moved into the Park's "Turtle Lagoon." Data are as follows:

Tag No.	Straight carapace		Curved carapace	
	Length	Width	Length	Width
NNW 780	78.6	58.3	82.5	69.0
NNW 781				
NNW 782	70.2	56.1	74.0	64.5
NNW 783				

While in Vancouver the turtles were held in an inside display tank with fluorescent lighting. Seawater temperature averaged about 25°C. Feeding occurred twice a week to satiation on a diet of frozen chopped fish.

The dorsal surfaces of the turtles are black, except for cream-colored seams between the scales on the head and flippers. The ventral surfaces are cream-colored or whitish. Upon arrival in Hawaii the turtles were completely free of algae and other fouling growth. However, by April 9th, some algal growth was present on the carapace and dorsal skin surfaces.

The larger turtle is clearly an adult male. Its tail is very thick at the base and measures at least 40 cm in length. The smaller turtle's tail measures only 29 cm and has a considerably smaller diameter to the base. This turtle is either an immature male, or an inter-sex individual. Upon being placed in the Turtle Lagoon, several of the existing male green turtles vigorously mounted this turtle to copulate.

About Kilo i'a

Issue No. 27

March 1983

Editor: Leighton Taylor

Circulation: Patricia Raines

Printing: Tongg Publishing

Kilo i'a is published bi-monthly by the Friends of the Waikiki Aquarium and is dedicated to increasing the community's knowledge of the Waikiki Aquarium and Hawaii's marine life.



WAIKIKI AQUARIUM

Kilo i'a

LOOKING AT THE SEA



Hawaiian Turtles in Canada

Throughout the years, sea turtles have been a popular attraction at the Aquarium. Visitors can currently see three species of them while learning about their unique ecology and threats to survival. The 11 inch olive ridley in gallery 1 offers a special treat since this species is seldom seen at such a young age. This particular one was found washed ashore on Molokai, tangled-up in plastic-lime. He was sent to the Aquarium 15 months ago, has since been restored to health and is now growing. Sharing the outdoor seal pool is an active adolescent hawksbill, with its longer beak and spiny-edged shell, and a larger male loggerhead who sleeps quietly on the bottom most of the time.

The number of turtles at the Aquarium has waxed and waned over its 79 year history. Green turtles or Honu, the most common of Hawaiian sea turtles, were once heavily exploited for food but are now legally protected. In the past, when a surplus existed from too many donations, turtles were tagged for research and returned to the sea. Some of the green turtles released in this manner were later found happily breeding at French Frigate Shoals, 600 miles up the Hawaiian chain. In 1957, three surplus green turtles left the Aquarium under somewhat novel circumstances

—aboard Canadian Pacific Airlines. This interesting and nearly forgotten story was pieced together from an old newspaper article and recent correspondence with the Vancouver Aquarium where two of the turtles are still living 27 years later. These "high-flying" turtles were sent up to Canada by former Waikiki Aquarium Director, Spencer Tinker to help celebrate the grand opening of the Vancouver Aquarium: Sea turtles don't normally occur off Vancouver, so the gift has provided millions of Canadians the unique opportunity of seeing these amazing reptiles.

It's just possible that these immigrant turtles have set a record for the length of time a green turtle has been kept in captivity. No one really knows just how long they can live, so records like this are helpful. The growth rates are also of interest. During the 27 years, the two turtles, one male and one too small to determine its sex, grew from a shell length of about 19 inches to sizes of 32¼ and 26¼ inches.

If you are ever in Vancouver, please stop by and say Aloha to our old friends!

UW marine biologist George Balazs has been studying Hawaiian sea turtles for the past 11 years and is an active supporter of the Aquarium.