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STATE OF HAWAII
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STATE SPONSORS "SURVIVAL STUDY" OF GREEN SEA TURTLE

How can the people of Hawaii continue to enjoy that popular ocean delicacy, the green sea turtle, while also making sure that the species continues to survive in adequate numbers?

The answer to that question will be sought via a three-year management study of the green sea turtle that begins this month. Funded by the State of Hawaii, via the Marine Affairs Coordinator in the Governor's Office, the study will be conducted by George H. Balazs, of the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology. He is regarded as the State's leading expert on sea turtles.

A special Legislative mandate calling for the green turtle study was included in the supplementary budget passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor this year. The study has long been a concern of Senator Jean King and the Senate Committee on Ecology, Environment and Recreation, which she heads.

Some of the study's more important objectives are:

1. To locate and inventory concentrations of turtles around the major inhabited islands as well as at areas in the more remote Leeward chain. Investigations

in the Leewards will serve to complement a joint State-Federal resource assessment survey of the area that is scheduled to begin later this year.

2. To determine the distribution and abundance of algae that is used for food by Hawaiian green turtles.
3. To determine the rate of growth and age at sexual maturity under natural conditions. Factual information on these two aspects is virtually nonexistent for any green turtle population. Several sites in the Hawaiian chain provide exceptional opportunities for gaining this knowledge through tag and recapture studies.
4. To determine the reproductive potential as well as the mortality factors limiting the population.

Although headquarters for the study will be the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology (HIMB), work will be carried out in close cooperation with the State Division of Fish and Game, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In addition, members of the general public who have information about Hawaiian sea turtles will be encouraged to contact Mr. Balazs by calling HIMB.

Three species of sea turtles occur in Hawaiian waters, the green (Chelonia sp.), the hawksbill (Eretmochelys sp.), and the leatherback (Dermochelys sp.). Of these, the green, or "honu" as it is called in Hawaiian, is by far the most common. Although

Press release - Green Sea Turtle
Page 3
Sept. 9, 1976

green turtles occur at a number of other locations around the world, the population native to Hawaii is unique. In addition to being the only population that carries out its entire life cycle in the United States, Hawaiian green turtles have the unusual behavioral trait of crawling out on remote beaches in the Leeward chain and sun basking for hours at a time.

Green turtles are famous for their long distance migrations which are made for breeding purposes. In Hawaii, they are known to periodically travel distances of 500 miles or more to the small islets of French Frigate Shoals (in the Leeward chain) to mate and lay eggs. Many of these adults spend the greater portion of their lives feeding on algae (limu) that grows in shallow waters around the main inhabited Hawaiian Islands.

Most of the world's sea turtle populations are experiencing significant declines due to habitat destruction, disturbance, and overexploitation for meat, hides, shell and soup stock. In 1974 the State Department of Land and Natural Resources adopted a regulation to help conserve the sea turtles found in Hawaii. Under this regulation hawksbills and leatherbacks are fully protected. These two species also receive full protection under the Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973. The taking of green turtles is still allowed in Hawaii, but only by permit for home consumption, and only if they are 36 inches or more in shell length. Prior to the 1974 State regulation, Hawaiian green turtles were