

Turtles find happy home in Hyatt lagoon

With the efficiency of movement that comes from long practice, George Balazs of the National Marine Fisheries Service recently caught, removed and tagged four of the green sea turtles that have taken up residency in the Hyatt Regency Waikoloa's lagoon.

The turtles, which are members of a threatened species, were removed from the lagoon, weighed, measured and examined for any physical defects or abnormalities before being released.

Balazs explained that the examination and tagging "... allows the National Marine Fisheries Service an increased knowledge of this threatened species and the ability to record each individual's progress for years to come."

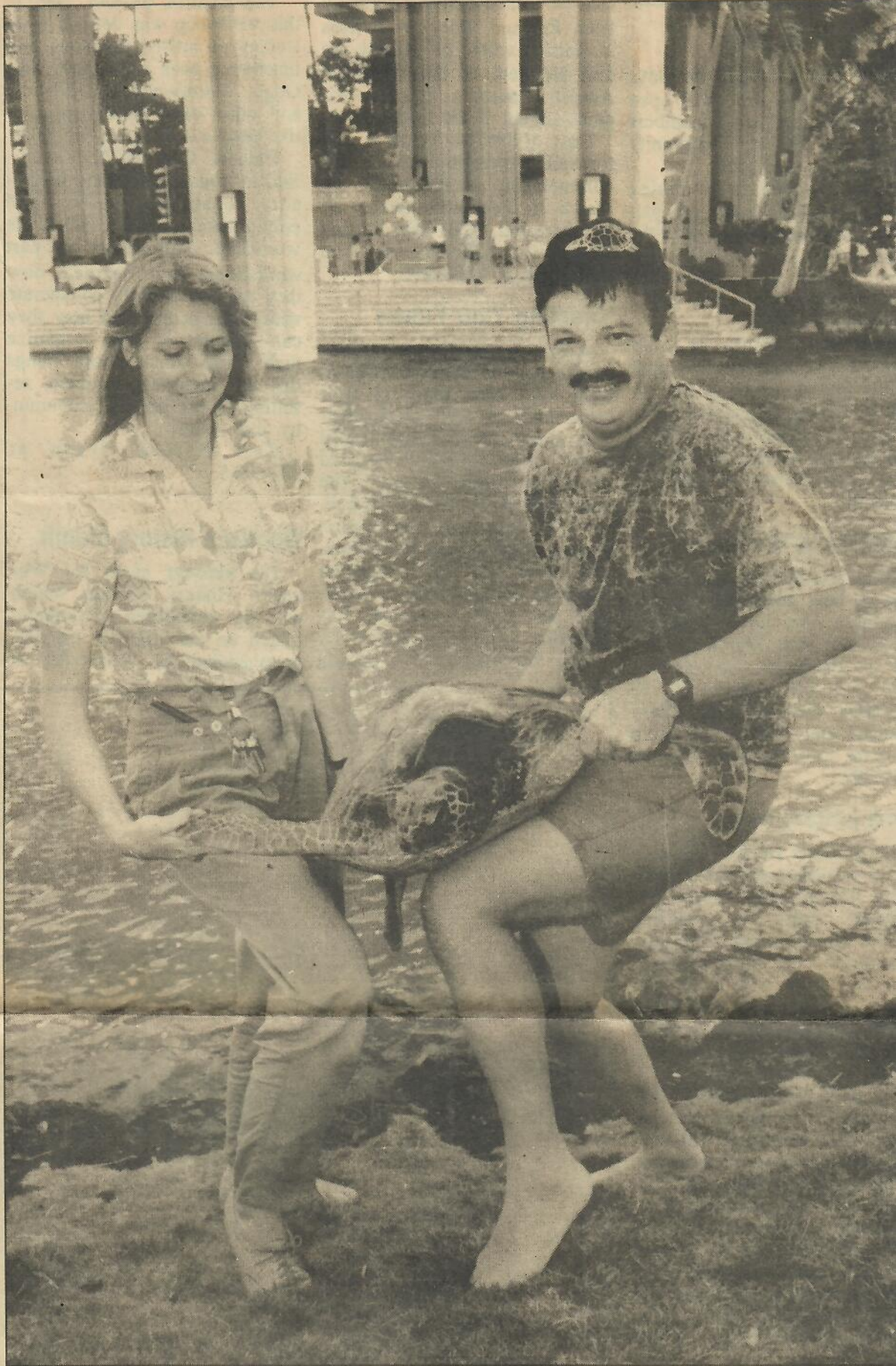
Seeking food and protection, the turtles can be seen around the base of the waterfall feeding constantly on the clumps of algae that come over the falls and grow on the rocks and ledges of the lagoon. With estimated ages of between 3 and 15 years, the smallest of the four weighed in at 22 pounds and the largest topped the 110-pound capacity of the scale.

Linda Elliott, Hyatt Regency Waikoloa's wildlife director, estimates that there are about six turtles in the resort's lagoon.

"It is difficult to know exactly why these turtles decided to make our lagoon their home," she said.

"We can only assume that the lagoon naturally affords them adequate protection from potential predators and plenty of food. We are very pleased to have these wonderful animals as our guests and consider the responsibility of ensuring their continued health and safety a privilege. I am delighted to report that George Balazs's initial findings show that each of the four he examined is thriving."

The National Marine Fisheries Service will continue to monitor the turtles on an ongoing basis. For more information, contact Balazs at the National Marine Fisheries Service at 943-1240 or Elliott at the Hyatt Regency Waikoloa at 885-1234, ext. 1290.



A SAFE HOME — As part of the National Marine Fisheries Service's efforts to better understand threatened species, green sea turtles that have made their home in the Hyatt Regency Waikoloa lagoon have been examined and tagged. Here, Linda Elliott of the Hyatt and George Balazs, National Marine Fisheries Service zoologist and leader of marine turtle research, prepare to return one of the threatened animals to the lagoon.