

Peter Bennett & Ursula Keuper-Bennett
24 Reid Drive, Unit 3
Mississauga, ON
L5M 2A6

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September 3, 1996

Hon. Neil Abercrombie
Rm. 1233 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Aloha!

We are two recreational divers from Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, who have been coming to Honokowai, Maui, every summer for several years. Since 1989, we have been photographing and videotaping the turtles that we see daily. Over that time, we have made nearly 1000 dives and have witnessed a disturbing deterioration in the condition of the turtles and their environment. This prompted us to send the following message to the CTURTLE mailing list, which distributes email to many of the world's experts on sea turtles. We believe that it would be a good idea to share this message with you, Hawaii's legislators.

Yesterday (July 29) we completed our 59th dive of the summer. It is just so discouraging here. We have seen more recruits/youngsters than ever before and you might think that should be good news. For us it isn't. Any young turtles arriving in our area quickly get fibropapillomas.

Last year's youngsters now show the distinctive white spots in the posterior of both eyes that have become harbingers of the disease. Worse, youngsters whose shells have barely had time to foul with algae show those white spots. All are at the same location--in the eyeball just anterior to the linking tissue of the eyeball and the outer canthus.

Youngsters, older turtles all the same. The first visible tumour is in that location in the eye. Why?

Our favourite and most special turtle has something funny happening in the same location of her left eye. She has allowed us to get a macro-photo of this, just four inches from her eye. We are trying hard to be objective and just recording tumour "progress" on the animals we have known for years but it is hard to stay cool.

The youngsters gnaw at our hearts. They are the most friendly and engaging and active and fly in our faces and sometimes get in the way and you grow to love them and yet already they have the white eye spots. The disease just eats them up and spits them out in as little as two years.

Something else. About two weeks ago, we videotaped and photographed two turtles copulating just seaward of the Turtle House. The male had multiple tumours--on both eyes and a grapefruit sized tumour on the nape of his neck. The female was new to us and appeared clean. The tumours changed a clumsy act into an ugly one. We have been thinking about it ever since.

So far we have sighted about eight adult males of which seven have tumours. During copulation they nip the back of the female's neck and there is prolonged contact. Can the

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disease also be transmitted in this way as well? And every summer we see large tagged females that we think are just stopping along their migration route. If they "meet up" with one of the Boyz, is this yet another way for the disease to be spread around the islands?

There is another thing we don't understand. Some turtles have been tumoured for years with very little change and have survived. For others, the tumours have exploded all over their bodies and done them in a matter of two seasons. Why?

Finally, to the scientists working on fibropapillomas. We think about you a lot and wish you inspiration and progress. If funding came from wishes, you'd have all you needed.

This message has been copied to you in the desperate hope that you, the caretakers of Hawaii's waters, will be inspired to increase efforts to clean up and protect this valuable resource. Aloha and best regards.

Peter Bennett & Ursula Keuper-Bennett

cc: Hon. Daniel K. Inouye
Hon. Daniel A. Akaka
Hon. Patsy Mink
The Maui News
The Honolulu Advertiser

*Peter Bennett
Keuper-Bennett*