

LARGE SEA TURTLE FOUND LIVING IN THE ALA WAI BOAT HARBOR

A large green sea turtle (Chelonia mydas) estimated to weigh over 250 lbs has been found living in calm waters well inside the Ala Wai Boat Harbor. Telephone reports from concerned boat owners and other individuals prompted sea turtle biologist George Balazs to investigate the matter by swimming underwater in the area where the animal had been regularly seen sleeping. The turtle was found to be in a weakened and somewhat sick condition, possibly as the result of several large tumors seen on the back portion of the shell and hind flippers.

The cause of such tumors on Hawaiian green sea turtles is currently unknown, however their occurrence seems to be on the increase. In some turtles, even small young ones, these tumors grow so extensively that the eyes become covered over. Tissue samples of tumors removed from dead turtles found washed ashore over the past few years have been sent to a specialist at the Smithsonian Institution (in Washington, D.C.) in an effort to explain the affliction. No conclusive results have been obtained, but analyses are still underway.

The turtle living in the Ala Wai Boat Harbor was found to have numbered identification tags attached to its front flippers- tags that Balazs himself had placed on the turtle while she was nesting at French Frigate Shoals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands during June of 1978. French Frigate Shoals, a unit of the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, is located about 500 miles northwest of Honolulu and is the principal breeding site for the Hawaiian population of green sea turtles. Based on tagging studies exemplified by this recent tag recovery, adult green sea turtles are known to regularly migrate back and forth between French Frigate Shoals and numerous sites throughout the Hawaiian chain. The Ala Wai Boat Harbor is not a location where normal healthy turtles regularly live. The turtle living there at present is believed to have taken up residency because of its weakened condition, and also possibly due to the periodic blooms of jellyfish that green turtles sometimes find attractive for food.

The public is asked not to disturb the turtle, but rather give her every opportunity to recover from her ailment. Sea turtles are fully protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and wildlife laws of the State of Hawaii.

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