

# More than jail to fear from eating turtles

To The Forum:

A mere slap-on-the-wrist, compared to what Mother Nature could have imposed as punishment. That's how one might view the two-day jail sentence recently handed down in Wailuku District Court on Maui to four homeless men from the mainland caught cooking a sea turtle.

The pitiful turtle they were foolish enough to cut up and eat was riddled with disease. Ulcerated tumors protruded from its eyes, neck, and shoulders. In addition, photos taken at the time indicate the animal was severely emaciated. This condition in sea turtles is often accompanied by infections of internal parasites, along with potentially nasty microorganisms.

No sick animal taken from the wild should ever be eaten. This applies to ones freshly killed, as well as those already dead for an unknown time, as the men in this case claimed in court. The possibility of severe illness from eating diseased wildlife is simply not worth the risk, even if the law isn't broken. Ironically, wholesome and hot meals are served free each day within walking distance of where the men were arrested with the turtle.

Just a few months ago a man was sentenced in federal court to a month in prison for intentionally killing a large turtle on the Big Island. Turtles were abusively over-exploited in Hawai'i for decades prior to becoming fully protected in the late 1970's. The average turtle takes about 25 years to become sexually mature (200 - 300 lbs). At certain locations in Hawai'i there are now some encouraging signs of population recovery. Most everyone would like to see this trend continue to ensure the longterm survival of these magnificent creatures. Turtles contribute to the overall diversity and enrichment of the Hawaiian marine environment. Also, like humpback whales, they are fun to watch. They are playing an increasing part of the ecotourism experience that results in an economic benefit to Hawai'i.

The rebuilding of a robust turtle population—one that will not easily fall into decline once again—is dependent upon keeping human-related mortality to a minimum. State and federal conservation enforcement officers should be supported, and praised for their fine efforts.

George H. Balazs  
Honolulu

THE GARDEN ISLAND (KAUAI) 2/19/94 194

Star-Bulletin

LETTERS

## Kauai ocean sound project would pose threat to turtles

Greater attention to sea turtles is justified when considering whether to allow the Kauai-based undersea sound-pollution project to be turned on. The project proposes to broadcast at an intense but low frequency emission of 70 Hz for an initial two-year test period.

Threatened and endangered green and hawksbill turtles are native to Kauai's coastal waters. Also, adult green turtles living around all of our populated islands must periodically travel past Kauai when migrating to and from French Frigate Shoals to breed in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

How sea turtles navigate when migrating is a mystery, but hearing may play some important part in the process. In 1969, Navy scientist Sam Ridgway published one of the few papers on hearing in the green turtle. The article appeared in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

The final paragraph of Ridgway's paper states: "We conclude from these observations that the giant (green) sea turtle has a serviceable ear, with a reasonable degree of sensitivity within a restricted range. Its ear is clearly a low-frequency receptor, with a useful span of perhaps 60 to 1000 Hz. Both on land and in the sea this ear no doubt enables the animal to perceive many important signals."

**GEORGE H. BALAZS**  
IUCN/SSC Marine  
Turtle Specialist Group

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# Letters

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## Stop slaughter

**Editor:**

On April 24, the recently butchered remains of two small sea turtles were found at Kiholo Bay. Another slaughtered turtle was reported there just three months ago.

If anyone has information that can help apprehend the person(s) responsible for these crimes, please call State Conservation Officers at 323-3141 (Kona), 933-4291 (Hilo), or Federal Agents in Honolulu at 541-2727.

Something urgently needs to be done to stop these acts of violence against Hawaii's wildlife.

**George H. Balazs**  
Honolulu

Hawaii Tribune - Herald: Monday, May 9, 1994—9

## **Turtles slaughtered**

On Sunday, April 24, the recently butchered remains of two small sea turtles were found at Kiholo Bay in North Kona. Another slaughtered turtle was reported at this same location just three months ago. If you have any information that can help apprehend the person(s) responsible for these crimes, please call state conservation officers at 933-4291 (Hilo), 323-3141 (Kona), or Federal agents in Honolulu at 541-2727.

**George H. Balazs**  
Honolulu

## Another sea turtle found dead

It's happened again. The killing continues. On May 13 another sea turtle was found dead at Kiholo Bay, the victim of drowning in a gillnet. Just three weeks earlier, on April 24, the butchered remains of two small turtles were discovered along the shoreline at this same location. And, in February, the cut-up parts of a turtle were found discarded into Kiholo's shallow waters.

Big Island residents can assist in preventing crimes like these from happening. If you see suspicious activity, or have information about the recent killing of turtles at Kiholo Bay, please call Federal Agents in Honolulu at 541-2727, State Conservation Officers at 933-4291 (in Hilo) and 323-3141 (in Kona), or dial 0 and ask the operator for Enterprise 5469.

George H. Balazs  
Honolulu

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A-6 Kauai Times, June 22, 1994

## Green sea turtle plan is working

Many thanks to Shelly Zeck for her excellent article (6/8/94) describing our newly initiated Hawaiian honu (green sea turtle) tagging project off Poipu. Readers of the *Kauai Times* will now have a much better understanding of the importance of this difficult but rewarding work on behalf of an animal struggling to recover from past decades of over-exploitation.

As mentioned in the article, the study will require several years to complete due to the special biological characteristics of green sea turtles (i.e. vegetarian diet, slow grow, delayed sexual maturity, lengthy reproductive migrations).

The outstanding involvement of The Ocean Recreation Council of Hawaii (Kauai's TORCH chapter) and the State of Hawaii's Division of Aquatic Resources guarantee the ultimate success of this long-term project.

The Honolulu Laboratory of the National Marine Fisheries Service is the lead agency for this research.

The article incorrectly identified me as being affiliated with another federal agency.

Three 1-day expeditions have now been accomplished during the past two months off Kauai's south shore.

This has resulted in the tagging of 26 Hawaiian Honu.

Unfortunately, several of these animals were afflicted with fibropapillomatosis, a debilitating and often fatal disease of sea turtles. The cause of this illness is currently unknown, but work is underway to provide answers.

During this initial work on Kauai, we are especially grateful to Mr. Rick Daley of Adventures West for the use of his boat, time and talents generously contributed to make the work successful and safe.

**George Balazs**

*Zoologist and Leader,*

*Marine Turtle*

*Research Program*

*Honolulu Laboratory*

*National Marine*

*Fisheries Service*



### Untangling Our Marine Resources at Kiholo Bay

■ Picturesque Kiholo Bay in North Kona on the Big Island has been known for decades as a special place favored by Hawaiian sea turtles. Young turtles are attracted to this site to feed on *limu* and to sleep underwater along the sheltered shoreline.

Kiholo is also recognized as an important nursery grounds for fish. Unfortunately, the abundance of fish appears to be much less now than it was 21 years ago when I first started visiting and snorkeling at Kiholo. It is my belief that the reason for this decline is the increased use of gill nets, which commonly block off portions of the bay when set from point to point. Too many fish, especially little fish, have been gilled and killed too often over the years.

Gill nets and sea turtles don't mix at Kiholo Bay. The entanglement, forced submergence and drowning of turtles in gill nets at Kiholo is now a regular occurrence. Some of the young turtles recently found dead at Kiholo appear to have been intentionally killed. Over the past three months, four turtles are known to have died by human hands at Kiholo. Three of them were butchered, and their remains were left on shore or discarded into shallow water.

Hawai'i's fishermen can be of assistance to our paid professional law enforcement officials who are attempting to apprehend violators and prevent crimes like the ones happening at Kiholo. If you see suspicious activity, or have information about the killing of turtles at Kiholo Bay or elsewhere in Hawai'i, please call federal agents in Honolulu at 541-2727, or state DOCARE officers at 323-3141 (in Kona); 933-4291 (in Hilo); 243-5414 (on Maui); 241-3521 (on Kaua'i); 567-6618 (on Moloka'i); 565-6688 (on Lana'i); or dial 0 from any neighbor island and ask the operator for "Enterprise 5469."

The long-term conservation of fish, turtles and other marine resources at small but important sites like Kiholo Bay will ultimately depend in part upon the exclusion or severe limitation of gill nets. Designating Kiholo as a Fishery Management Area would be a reasonable first step to the process. Hopefully some far-sighted individuals and/or organizations on the Big Island will pursue this worthy goal.

... George Balazs

### READER'S PAGE

## Mail Buoy



# Opinion

## Letter to the editor

### Biologist praises Cierras for Hanauma's turtle art

Editor:

Mahalo and congratulations to marine artist Shaning Cierras for his impressive new mural at Hanauma Bay!

The sea turtles featured in this work of art are especially attractive and lifelike. Sea turtles are

playing an increasing role in Hawaiian ecotourism. Like humpback whales, they enrich our environment and contribute to Hawaii's economic well-being.

Thank you, Shaning, for sharing your talents with all of us — residents and tourists alike.

**GEORGE BALAZS**

*Sea turtle biologist*

*National Marine Fisheries Service*



# Letters

THE MAUI NEWS  
11-10-94

## Turtles need protection

Emergency measures need to be taken to prevent auto collisions with critically endangered hawksbill turtles trying to lay their eggs on the shores of Maalaea Bay. Just last year a nesting female was hit and crushed to death while trying to cross North Kihei Road in the dead of night. Now, in recent days, one or two more of these rare animals have had close calls on the same stretch of highway.

The immediate solution to this problem is to erect a low (2-foot) fence along the makai roadway where the danger exists. The turtles have no business crossing the road, and under no circumstances should be allowed to do so. If eggs are laid in a nest on the mauka side, the small hatching turtles that later emerge will be run over, or severely disoriented, when they try to crawl to sea.

Action urgently needs to be taken to reduce or eliminate this roadway hazard before last year's tragedy is repeated.

*Maui News*

11-10-94

George H. Balazs  
Honolulu  
Deputy Chairman  
Marine Turtle Specialist Group

### **Turtle tumors troubling**

The recent photo and short article (Sept. 5) about a dead green turtle with tumors washing ashore at Kaanapali once again emphasizes the problems still confronting this special ocean animal in Hawaii.

The issues of fibropapilloma tumor disease, accidental entanglement and death in gill nets, and illegal hunting and harassment continue to plague this species. Researchers and conservation officials here and across the nation are working hard to deal with these and other problems confronting sea turtles.

Protection under the U.S. Endangered Species Act over the past 17 years has resulted in some positive signs of sea turtle recovery in Hawaii.

But the process needs to continue unimpeded by abnormal levels of disease and other types of mortality and stress. The average green turtle in Hawaiian waters requires more than two decades to grow to maturity and become large enough to migrate many hundreds of miles to reproduce (at French Frigate Shoals).

Sea turtles found dead, dying from disease, or injured from spear wounds or boat collisions are frequently flown to Honolulu for treatment or autopsy by veterinary specialists. Personnel of the State of Hawaii's Division of Aquatic Resources and the Division of Conservation and Resource Enforcement on Maui regularly respond to reports of turtles in trouble. Their outstanding efforts are worthy of praise by the community. The public should support their work wherever possible.

**George H. Balazs**  
**Marine Turtle Research**  
**NOAA/NMFS Honolulu Laboratory**

*Maui News (Letters) 09-13-95*

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Honolulu Star-Bulletin

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## If you spot a sea turtle feasting, call now . . .

An interesting story Sept. 9 by Star-Bulletin reporter Greg Ambrose reported on the painful sting beach-goers can suffer from a new and larger type of Portuguese man-of-war now drifting into Hawaiian waters. It is worthwhile to add that many sea turtles worldwide are prominent predators of jellyfish, which they consume opportunistically without apparent discomfort or harm.

Records exist of our Hawaiian sea turtles sporadically feeding on the normal, smaller form of man-of-war. Our research program of sea turtles within the Protected Species Investigation of the National Marine Fisheries Service would like to hear from anyone seeing a turtle eating the new species now invading Hawaiian waters.

Besides having much larger floats (up to 6 inches long), the new jellyfish is cobalt blue and armed with thicker, longer and more numerous stinging tentacles. Please telephone your report to 943-1276. A recorder will take your message whenever personnel are unable to answer the phone.

**GEORGE H. BALAZS**  
Marine Turtle Research  
NOAA/NMFS Honolulu Laboratory