

Waking the Hanauma turtles a quiet dawn ritual for divers

The People Who Wake the Turtles at Hanauma Bay every Friday morning arrive there as the clouds are ablush with the discovery of dawn.

It's a magic moment between day and night when time stands still, palms trees etched delicately in black against the sky, wavelets washing softly on the beach.

But the stillness is an illusion captured in the mind like a painting because day comes quickly on silent feet as The People Who Wake the Turtles shed their land clothes and slip on face masks and fins.

The People Who Wake the Turtles have traveled all over the world, yet they have found at Hanauma Bay a treasure that draws them back every week.

They are hardly what you would call athletes because they are all in their 70s and they paddle sedately out to wake the turtles. The turtles sleep snugly on the sand in their favorite holes in the coral.

"Turtle, turtle," shouted Roy Gritter over the calm water last Friday. He had wakened three.



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"Turtle," shouted Laura Manis and Ruth Ellen Lindenberg. They had wakened two.

The turtles roused themselves and swam lazily with their friends to the reef where they departed the bay for a day of adventure in the deep ocean. In the evening they came back to their nests in the reef.

That morning Laura, a retired professor of sociology, saw two big ulua outside the reef and a three-foot-long yellow trumpet fish.

Roy, a retired chemistry professor and IBM researcher, said he saw about 30 varieties of fish.

Each of The People Who Wake the Turtles has his or her favorite story of underwater adventure at Hanauma Bay. "The most dramatic thing I've seen is two octopus play-

ing with each other," said Joe Singer, retired engineer, sculptor and print maker. "They were spread out, waving their arms as if they were making sign language."

Arlen Grabbe, retired as secretary in a mental health office, remembers getting bitten by male black spotted sergeant fish guarding a nest of eggs. "When they bite you on the thigh, it really smarts," she said.

"You know, it's funny, no matter how many people who come here, you can't spoil it," said Ruth Ellen who heads up the legislative committee of the American Association of Retired Persons in Hawaii. "Hanauma Bay could go on like this forever with reasonable care."

They all agree. Yet Roy said the 30 varieties of fish he saw at Hanauma Friday morning compares poorly to the 80 and 90 he sees at KaaNapali.

"It may be the nicotine in the water from cigarettes that smokers throw on the beach," he said. "At Hanauma Bay, you find far fewer varieties of fish inside the reef than outside."

He said he is also beginning

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Section A pg 3



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The People Who Wake the Turtles on the shore of Hanauma Bay.

to see turtles with tumors they think may be caused by chemicals in the water.

However, The People Who Wake the Turtles are optimistic about the future of Hanauma Bay. They credit park manager Alan Hong, and support of him by the City Council, for actions that have greatly improved conditions for fish at

the park. These actions include banning tour buses from the park, closing the park on Wednesday mornings and requiring visitors to feed fish only food sold at the park.

The People Who Wake the Turtles recognize Stephanie Skodak, a 78-year-old who snorkeled all over the world,

as their founding spirit. It was she who led them into the water at Hanauma Bay. She died several years ago of cancer. They buried her beyond the reef.

Eight to ten of her disciples continue to wake the turtles every Friday. "We've been rained out only three times since 1985," said Arlen.