

Eating *honu* honored special link with ocean

I would like to respond to the July 29 letter, "Friendly, endangered turtles would be decimated if harvesting resumed."

The comments of the authors, Ursula Keuper-Bennett and Peter Bennett, on the *honu* (turtles), are indicative of the Western attitude. They lack the knowledge of the host culture with its spiritual association with the ocean and its fauna and flora.

Island Voices

CHARLES
MAXWELL

Our ancestors, the kanaka maoli, arrived on these shores 1,300 years

before Capt. James Cook "discovered" us. They sailed thousands of miles throughout the Pacific with only the stars, winds and currents to guide them to these islands.

The animals in the ocean are the *kinolau* (spiritual manifestation) of the god Kanaloa. To consume the animals in the ocean is not only for the purpose of sustenance but also for spiritual and cultural association with the god Kanaloa. The turtle was a symbol of long life and in ancient times was given to the high chief, because its head "lived" after being separated from its body.

An entire generation of kanaka maoli grew up and was deprived of experiencing the cultural connection to the turtle.

Twenty years ago, hotels and restaurants throughout Hawaii featured turtle steak as an "exotic" food item. That's why the turtles became endangered — through greedy exploitation, and not by the actions of native people.

There are so many turtles now in the Western Pacific that it is time the indigenous people are allowed to take green sea turtles for cultural purposes and home consumption in a controlled process.

The native people in each region throughout the Western Pacific should set an amount that would not harm the population of turtles. This would restore nature's balance of the turtle population. Biologists and the indigenous people could work together to achieve this goal.

To forbid the taking of *honu* is a prime example of placing restrictions on kanaka maoli without their input and knowledge of management. Remember, when Capt. Cook arrived here in 1778, the islands were planted from the mountain to the sea. The islands were surrounded with thousands of fishponds that were "overflowing" with fish. He commented that "these people must have a superior knowledge of the land and sea."

Let's try to gain some of this "balance" back for nature's sake.

Charles Kauluwehi Maxwell Sr. is a Hawaiian cultural specialist.

Friendly, endangered turtles would

Mahalo and congratulations to The Honolulu Advertiser for the editorial "Don't rush returning turtles to the table." As you correctly and wisely point out, "the simple increase in the turtle population measured in recent years is not enough to take the restrictions off."

Unlike turtles from most other regions in the Pacific, Hawaii's turtles (*honu*) are struggling with a disease called fibropapillomatosis — tumors that grow over eyes,

mouth and soft body parts. Many die from this affliction. Your state Senate recently passed a resolution recognizing this disease as "a serious threat to Hawaii's green sea turtle." Worse, the evidence indicates that this threat is growing. Obviously, turtle hunters would only take turtles without tumors, reducing the healthy population.

The second concern is a philosophical one.

Since Hawaii's sea turtles came under protection in 1978,

they have experienced frequent contact with humans. Everywhere there are brochures inviting tourists to visit one of many "turtle towns." Every day, tour boats take snorkelers and divers to "meet the honu." Many of Hawaii's turtles have therefore learned that humans are safe and have lost their natural fear of them.

This blissful tameness will make them "sitting ducks" when limited "harvesting" suddenly turns the tables on

be decimated if harvesting resumed

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them.

Taking advantage of trusting animals brings no one honor and flies directly in the face of the "aloha spirit." The honu deserve better.

The honu are an important part of the Hawaiian culture, but not just as animals to be slaughtered. At Punalu'u Beach on the Big Island there is a monument that honors Hawaii's sea turtles. It also honors the "Legend of Kauila."

According to Hawaiian leg-

end, Kauila was a turtle with special power. She could turn herself into a young girl. She did this so she could play with children. She also liked to keep watch over them. The people of Ka'u loved Kauila as the guardian of their children.

Punalu'u Beach is a beautiful cove of black sand. There are many green sea turtles there. These turtles are tame and friendly and they often swim close to children playing and swimming in the water.

We encourage Hawaii's in-

digenuous leaders to remember this aspect of the honu as well.

Should the move for "limited harvesting" be successful, however, we beg that indigenuous leaders show mercy for the honu and agree to limit their harvest/kill to locations well away from recognized diving spots and anywhere else where turtles are known to be "tame and friendly."

**Ursula Keuper-Bennett
and Peter Bennett**

PIKELOT ISLAND

Turtles on menu to honor Makali'i

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Hunt is part sport,
part survival

Hawaii Advertiser

By Bob Krauss

ADVERTISER STAFF WRITER

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PIKELOT, Micronesia — Two giant turtles mated in the clear blue ocean on this glorious morning, their heads and flippers splashing in awkward exuberance.

Sooty terns and boobies wheeled overhead. Pikelot, an uninhabited grove of coconut palms floating on the ocean, lay a few hundred yards away.

Sea turtles have been going to tiny Pikelot to lay their eggs as long as anybody can remember.

But today the turtles were not alone. Six crewmen from the FSS Independence edged close, in their inflatable boat, to capture the turtles. The Independence is a Micronesian coast guard boat escorting the Hawaii voyaging canoe Makali'i.

Four men slipped into the water.

I have to admit that I felt sorry for the turtles. They should be entitled to a little privacy. Yet turtle hunting is a traditional sport in these atolls, and a means of survival.

The men grappled with the turtles, then climbed back into the boat. "They lost it," said the boatswain on the boat deck. I can't say that I was dismayed.

The turtles are enormous, 200 pounds or more. The previous night, the inflatable boat had gone in with a half-dozen men to camp on the beach and to capture turtles that crawled up to lay eggs.

Pikelot is the size of Sand Island, a speck of sand and coral in a vast ocean. It's the classic movie version of a

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Pikelot: Turtles to provide feast

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castaway's island, palm trees circled by a pristine beach.

The only building is a Catholic church, with a tin roof and no walls except on the altar side. Turtle hunters pray there after safe arrival. There is no water except for the contents of coconuts.

The crew had caught five turtles. Smoke rose from the beach where Robert Malewalig, the cook, barbecued a turtle while Independence circled the island.

Four live turtles came back in the boat to be winched onto the stern, where they were covered with nets like cargo. They are for the big celebration at Satawal, where we're heading.

The expedition left Puluwat Atoll yesterday morning. Makali'i and its escort, Zip Pur, sailed direct for Satawal with master navigator Mau Pailug. Independence took this side trip to Pikelot.

During our three-day stay, the turtles will provide food for the na-

tives of Satawal, one of the poorest of the atolls.

Makali'i left the Big Island on Feb. 10. Its crew of 45 is taking Pailug home to Satawal in gratitude for Mau's teaching Hawaiians to sail by the stars and ocean swells 25 years ago.

Satawal is 2,800 miles southwest of Hawaii.

Hospitality for Makali'i during stopovers has been so abundant that few of the food supplies on the canoe have been used. Clay Bertelmann, the expedition leader, said he'll give food to the Satawalese.

There have been feasts and celebrations all along the way.

Makali'i crew member Kainani Kahaunaale of Hilo, who composes songs and is a professional musician, says the singing and dancing on the atolls is wonderful.

"There's no hesitation from the youngest to the oldest," she said. "The harmony is so sweet. You can see happiness in their faces. My hypothesis is that they can spend more time singing because they

don't have many distractions."

At Puluwat Atoll, the men spent one morning making costumes of yellow coconut fronds and husking drinking coconuts for the feast. They performed stick dances that they said originated with an old man who learned them from spirits during the German colonial era after the turn of the century.

"I love the way people come together on the atolls; people of all ages singing the same song, harmonizing together," said Kainalu Bertelmann, 19, the youngest crew member on Makali'i.

Kainalu, of Waimea, Hawaii, is the son of Shorty Bertelmann, navigator of Makali'i along with Mau.

Kainalu, already an experienced voyager, went to sea on board Makali'i in 1995 sailing from Tahiti to Nukuhiva to Hawaii at age 15.

"It's hard to explain how I feel right now," he said. "Ever since I was growing up, Mau has been saying, 'Come to my island.' I never thought I would. I can't believe it's actually happening."