



Mau'i Coastal Land Trust / DALE BONAR photo

Wildlife biologists Skippy Hau (left) and Glynnis Nakai keep an eye on a batch of hawksbill turtle hatchlings clambering out of a nest in the sand at Makena Beach on Sunday morning, while a crowd of volunteers and beachgoers looks on.

Turtles hatch at three island spots

By HARRY EGAR
Staff Writer

This past weekend was the high point of the season for sea turtle fanciers.

Wildlife specialists Glynnis Nakai and Skippy Hau, and Turtle Patrol volunteers excavated three nests on three different coasts and were pleased to discover excellent success at all three.

Nakai, manager of the Kealia Pond National Wildlife Refuge, said Tuesday, "It's a good year. After there hadn't been a sign of a nest last year, it's rejuvenated our volunteers."

Biologists try to monitor nests and to follow up after the hatchlings emerge, both to get genetic material (the shells) for study and, if the timing is right, to help any laggards crawl out of the sand.

The hunt began Friday night, when Hau, a marine biologist with the state Division of Aquatic Resources, led the team to a spot fishers had tipped him to at the old Waihee Dairy.

"They saw the big pits and knew who to call," says Nakai. The fishers also had spotted a nest a couple of years ago in the area, very likely dug by the same green sea turtle.

It was just one nest, in an unpromising location, but of the 99 eggs, 93 percent of the babies had made it out for their dangerous life in the ocean.

The beach is now protected under the Mau'i Coastal Land Trust,

but it does not appear to be prime turtle territory. There is a hard crust under the loose surface sand, says Nakai, and the beach tends to erode.

"It's amazing; she managed to poke a hole through the crust and made a nice chamber. It reminds us that we're not turtles." A crowd of youngsters gathered round to watch the dig.

The next night, the turtle trackers were at Makena to excavate a very rare hawksbill turtle nest.

Again, the mother made just a single nest, but it also was productive, again achieving a 93 percent hatching rate.

On Monday night, the excavators were in familiar territory just south of Lahaina Shores to excavate another nest of Mau'i Girl, green sea turtle 5690.

She's nested in Lahaina every other year since 2000 and has made seven nests this year, equaling the number of 2002.

Nakai says it looks as if 5690 is through for the year, as she hasn't been seen ashore in August. In season, she crawls ashore almost like clockwork every two weeks.

She lives at Napili.

Her fifth nest was dug out Tuesday and, as usual, yielded a good crop of threatened baby turtles, who were guided to the water to start life in the wild.

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