

Extinction threatened

I was astonished to read the "mini-editorial on the subject of turtles" which appeared in the Dining Out advertising supplement of the Sunday Star-Bulletin and Advertiser (1/18).

The author, Mrs. Frances King, claimed to have "set the record straight" on the ethics of restaurants in Hawaii selling imported sea turtle soup and meat. What she actually did was to spread erroneous information that is damaging to responsible efforts to conserve these vanishing creatures.

In essence, Mrs. King told her readers that it is perfectly all right to order sea turtle dishes. Her rationale for this stamp of approval was that such products are not obtained from our locally depleted turtle population, but rather from European sources where Mediterranean turtles are "plentiful" and "not endangered". Let's see if the facts can support her claims.

1. Nearly all sea turtle products coming from Europe are derived from animals that were killed at widely separated areas around the world. The Caribbean is presently one of the principal areas of exploitation. At this location, company ships are efficiently exterminating turtles in their shallow water feeding pastures. On the nesting beaches, adult females are slaughtered when they crawl out of the ocean — often even before having a chance to lay their eggs.

Also not uncommon is the practice of killing turtles solely for the few pounds of cartilage that can be cut from their belly plates. Such dried cartilage brings a



high price from the European processing plants where it is turned into what Mrs. King alludes to as "soup of the evening, beautiful soup!" In short, companies in Europe are literally ransacking the earth to supply the international luxury market with sea turtle products.

2. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), one of the most highly respected conservation organizations in the world, has examined the global survival status of sea turtles.

Its findings revealed that the majority of the populations are either extinct, threatened with extinction, or rapidly declining. A major factor found to be responsible for this dismal situation is the international trade in sea turtle products (meat, soup, hides and shell). Further, all species of sea turtles, including those found in the Mediterranean, now have the dubious distinction of appearing on the IUCN's "endangered" list.

To quote the words of Dr. Archie Carr, the foremost authority on sea turtles, what we need is "more sanctuaries, more research, and a concerted effort by all impractical, visionary, starry-eyed and antiprogressive organizations, all little old ladies in tennis shoes, and all persons able to see beyond the ends of their noses, to control the international commerce in sea turtle products." I might add that this certainly also applies to existing commercial turtle "farms", as their present practices are not in the conservation interests of sea turtles.

I really can't see why some restaurants in Hawaii (and their advertising agents) feel insecure if they aren't selling genuine sea turtle dishes. Alternate or imitation products of equal taste and exotic appeal are readily available. Their use would not place the persons involved in the unethical position of helping to drive a species to the brink of extinction.

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letters
