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A CALL FOR OBSERVATIONS: TURTLES IN FISH STOMACHS

by George H. Balazs

Virtually nothing is known about the life of sea turtles from the time they leave their natal beaches as one-ounce hatchlings until they are first seen as juveniles, 10 lbs and larger, in shallow-water feeding pastures close to shore. This lack of information is due mostly to the fact that turtles under 10 lbs are seldom seen under natural conditions, thereby making them unavailable for scientific study. It has been reasonably assumed that smaller size turtles live for a period of time in the open ocean, away from land, where they feed at the surface on small invertebrates such as squids and crustaceans.

One method which I believe has considerable potential for gaining biological and ecological information on this little-known size category involves the indirect sampling of the turtles from the stomachs of pelagic fishes such as tuna, mahimahi, marlin and certain sharks. These fishes could be expected to periodically eat small turtles. The recovery of whole small turtles or turtle parts from the stomachs of such predators is therefore entirely possible, provided that the person conducting the examination is alerted to the importance of such a finding.

If an HAS member or friend should find a turtle or turtle part in the stomach of a fish, I would greatly appreciate it if he would contact me on Oahu at 247-6631. Phone collect if you are on an outer island. If I am not in my office when you call, please leave your name and number with our secretary, and I will contact you at the earliest opportunity. After learning of your discovery by telephone, I would like to pick up the recovered material and transfer it to our laboratory for detailed study.

Thank you in advance for any assistance that you can provide to this research project.

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