

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
GAINESVILLE, 32611

DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGY
223 BARTRAM HALL
904-392-1107

October 19, 1984

Mr. George Balazs
NMFS
P.O. Box 3830
Honolulu, HI 96812

Dear George:

Thanks for the copy of the report of your hatchling-tagging results. You got some surprizingly good durability.

What I was trying to do in my endless, fruitless trials of tagging technique was mainly to test the notion--which most of us have--that female turtles you see on shore were hatched somewhere nearby. Today that aim seems even more unattainable than ever, now that estimates of the time to sexual maturity have trebled or even quintupled.

With the good results you have you could expect to learn a lot about hatchling ecology and movements from short-term recoveries--made during the time before the tags are popped off or overgrown--but what about the "lost-year"? As you know, it's difficult to go out and find post-hatchlings yourself, and it's slow going even if you depend on the reports of a network of volunteer collaborators as I have come to do. Two years ago we marked 2000 Tortuguero green turtles, released them at the nesting beach, and then searched for them in the driftline off Colon and Bocas in Panama. Neither we nor any of the people whose help we enlisted have ever seen a single one of that lot. We marked these with coded lateral notches. Your tags would be a lot better because returns by strangers could be expected. What is now needed is a way to increase the reasonable recovery.

Circumstantial evidence on occupancy of convergences has grown, and large numbers of post-hatchlings of all ages up to a year or more have been reported in driftlines. You are right that hurricanes must play hell with the lost-year group--but so must it be unrestful for all of the driftline biota.

I did some snooping after hurricanes Diana and Isidore along the Georgia and Florida coast, made a lot of phone calls from North Carolina to Cape Florida, and received more from people there. The two storms added up to a real disaster for the U.S. loggerhead. Nests remaining unhatched were washed out or flooded, and hatchlings in the longshore driftline were driven ashore in rolls of weed. Everybody I talked with agrees it was a serious setback.

As for your question about the turtles eating banana wrappers in Costa Rica, I can't give you a specific reference. But when we lived there in the late 1950's it was common knowledge that mature green (black) turtles were dying near the banana docks at Golfito over on the Pacific coast, and that the cause was ingestion of the plioform sacks they put bananas in. If I were there, I could get references to newspaper articles. Sorry I can't do better.

Sincerely yours,

Archie Carr mes

Archie Carr
Graduate Research Professor

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Dear Mr. Balazs:

Dr. Carr asked me to send this on to you without his signature with a note that he did not have a chance to look over the final copy. He will not return to the office until Monday and wanted this mailed out as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,

Marge Scerbo
Secretary to Dr. Carr

February 24, 1986

F/SWC2:GHB

Dr. Archie Carr
Department of Zoology
203 Bartram Hall
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32611

Dear Archie,

Many thanks for your telephone call last Friday. I was delighted to learn that you have accepted an invitation to speak at the ocean disposal symposium in California this April. The problems that drift plastics present to pelagic-dwelling sea turtles certainly need to be stressed at this international scientific gathering. You can count on me to provide you with whatever background information I have as a result of my November 1984 paper presented at the debris workshop here in Honolulu. Also, as you requested, I'll duplicate an assortment of slides that were used in presenting my paper. I can bring them with me to the Georgia workshop later next month.

Larry Ogren may have already told you that our Honolulu debris workshop unfortunately did not result in any of the special appropriations being committed for sea turtle debris interaction research. Cross-species competition for available funds invariably results in projects for marine mammals winning out. Sea turtles in the Pacific often suffer from this fate, unlike the situation in your area of the world. I am hoping that your speaking out independently on behalf of sea turtles at the forthcoming symposium will help to provide a better balance to the situation.

I look forward to seeing you again next month. Best personal regards to you and your family.

Sincerely,

George H. Balazs
Zoologist

cc: Balazs ✓
HL