



The HONU Whisperer

**VOLUME 8 ISSUE 1
2023**

Mission:

“To protect the Hawaiian green sea turtles through education, public awareness and conservation, all in the spirit of Aloha.”

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IN THIS ISSUE

Welcome to the first issue of The Honu Whisperer of 2023! This issue is full of amazing stories and amazing people. We catch up with some of our volunteer ‘ohana including long time volunteer Janis Honda. Our Zookeeper Tales has two entries this issue and we are reintroduced to long time basker Hao. Joe gives us a wonderful detailing of her time at Laniākea including some beautiful chronological pictures. She is an elusive and sturdy lady! Our issue ends with some great tips from Sadie as we enter another nesting season. Please consider joining the team this year! Cheers to another year!

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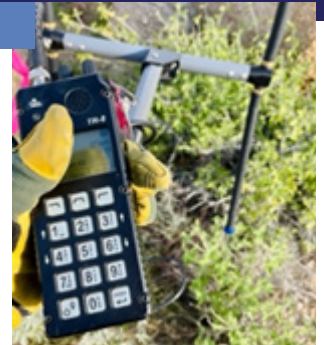
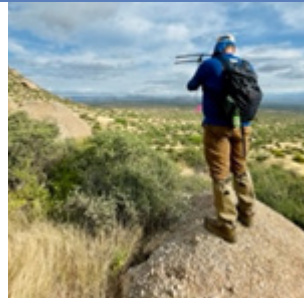
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mālama i nā honu`Ohana

Graham using telemetry antenna and receiver

GRAHAM TWADDLE



My name is Graham Twaddell, I live in Arizona, but volunteer at Laniākea with our honu when I come to the island for work projects. At home in Arizona, I am a Steward volunteer with the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy at McDowell Sonoran Preserve, located within the boundaries of the City of Scottsdale.

Last year I was fortunate to be able to participate in a Citizen Science project studying Sonoran Desert Tortoises at the Preserve.

The Sonoran Desert tortoise (*Gopherus morafkai*) is a protected species found in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. This species is under increasing pressure from climate change, human activities, and habitat degradation, which may affect their numbers.

These seldom-seen animals are important in the ecosystem, providing food for other species (mountain lions are their main predator) as well as shelter through the burrows they dig.



Tortoise with VHF radio telemetry transmitter attached

In the Sonoran Desert, wild tortoises can live about 35 or 40 years although some live to be much older. An adult desert tortoise can measure up to 14 inches (35.5cm) in length. Hatchlings are only 2 to 2 1/2 inches (5 to 6.5 cm) long.

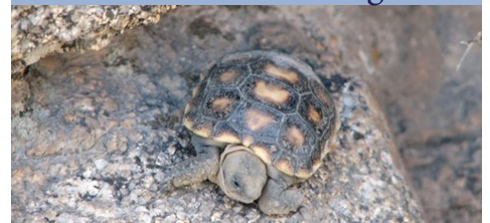
As a long-lived species with slow recruitment (few young survive to adulthood), the desert tortoise is vulnerable to human and environmental pressures. Chief threats facing this species include habitat loss and fragmentation, removal from the wild, disease, introduced species and more. Some populations have experienced declines, primarily those around human developments. In Arizona, it is considered a Species of Greatest Conservation Need, and it is currently being considered for federal listing as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

Little is known about the tortoise population in McDowell Sonoran Preserve or what factors might be affecting it. Understanding how human activities might influence this sensitive species helps the Conservancy and the City of Scottsdale (where the Preserve is located) make appropriate management decisions to protect the tortoise and the Preserve ecosystem.

The Conservancy is studying the local tortoise population using a combination of surveys and radio telemetry. Field work began in April 2021 by locating and “processing” 24 tortoises. Transmitters were attached to 17 adults and two immature tortoises (from the 24 located). Once a tortoise is located, it is “processed” by recording a thorough health assessment, add unique identifying marks to the shell, then temporarily attach a very high frequency (VHF) radio telemetry transmitter so it can be found again. Global Positioning System (GPS) trackers will be attached this year in April to record its movements every hour.

These trackers do not affect tortoise behaviors or movements. Tracking desert tortoise movements provides a better understanding of how tortoises are using the Preserve and what factors might affect their population. Information about this population also helps understand trends throughout this species’ range and how to best protect it into the future.

Tortoise Hatchling



Continued on next page

At the end of the study, all these electronics will be safely removed. This is harmless to the tortoise and an important part of the study. Stewards work under special City and state permits and have been trained to safely handle tortoises.

The transmitted tortoises frequently moved throughout their active season (roughly April through October), with activity and distance of movements increasing during the monsoon season. Most were found far from human activities, but some have been found near trails and trailheads. Two immature tortoises made long-distance movements of up to 5km and were found crossing roads in residential areas adjacent to the Preserve. An adult male made a long-distance movement, skirting around an active construction area before returning to his home area. Tortoises settled into their overwinter areas in October-November.

Additionally, this project feeds into the knowledge of how the Preserve acts as a habitat linkage within the larger region. The Preserve provides a vital connection for nearly 3 million acres of protected landscapes, extending from Tonto National Forest through the Preserve and into McDowell Mountain Regional Park. Understanding how species such as tortoises, mule deer and more move about the landscape is essential for determining management needs to maintain that connectivity and ensure these species continue to thrive in this area.

Tortoises were most often found in rock shelters (50.6% of locations) but were also frequently observed in the open (20.6%), under shrubs (17.2%), or in

soil burrows (11.0%). As expected, tortoises became more active during the monsoon months, and many made long-distance movements. Due to the worldwide chip shortage, we did not receive GPS trackers until late October so were not able to deploy them in 2021; we plan to deploy them this spring when the tortoises emerge from brumation (mammals hibernate, reptiles and amphibians brumate). Brumation is a state of dormancy when physical activity is temporarily stopped. Tortoises may wake up to drink water and return to “sleep”. They can go for months without food.

We continued to acquire weekly locations on transmitted tortoises and documented all incidental tortoise observations for a total of 489 data points in 2021. Tortoises settled into their overwinter locations from mid-October to mid-November, and we are locating them at least monthly during brumation.

On separate occasions in August, local residents observed tortoises crossing busy roadways in their neighborhoods and, seeing the license plate we use to mark them, thought they might be escaped pets and brought them into captivity. The residents contacted Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD), who put us in touch with them. The tortoises had made long-distance movements out of the Preserve (straight-line distances of 1.4 and 5.2 km). Because knowledge of these movements into urbanized areas would aid our objectives, we collaborated with AZGFD biologists to attach small transmitters to the immature animals and then released them at their original

capture locations in the Preserve. We now have our GPS loggers. They will record a location every hour for about three weeks before we need to replace them. Beginning in early April, field leads will re-capture every tortoise, install the GPS tracker, and perform a health assessment. Afterwards, we will make telemetry trips to remove and replace the GPS tracker about every three weeks.

The 3-year study will give the Preserve a better understanding of tortoise movements and activity patterns in this area, as well as factors affecting the population. These data will help the Conservancy and the City of Scottsdale make better management decisions to protect the tortoises and the Preserve ecosystem.

I am looking forward to participating in this Citizen Science project again this year.



Sonoran Desert Tortoise

See links for more info:

<https://www.azgfd.com/wildlife/nongamemanagement/tortoise/>

<https://www.mcdowellsonoran.org/>

JANIS HONDA

I started in 2005 with Mālama i nā honu, so I'm on my 17th year and going. I believe sometimes it's hard to give material things, but you can give your time, which is the most valuable thing to something or someone.

I choose to give back to the islands – giving back to the honu, and when we have Hawaiian Monk Seals come up [onto the beach] too, helping them get rest and educate people on the monk seal. It can be weird – sometimes we don't have honu up, but a monk seal will come up (Kaimana RJ58) who is Rocky's (RH58) daughter. It's very nice to see the monk seal because they are very endangered. We tell bystanders that and they say, "That's nice but where is the turtle?" People still want to see the honu up.

The nonprofit means a lot to me because I get to be on a beach helping people understand why the honu are there to bask, which is a new behavior for the Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle. Basking is resting, getting away from sharks, and having the sand temperature help with digesting their food while they are sleeping.

So many people want to see a turtle in person. It's a gift to see people's wish come true. People are surprised when we tell them to stop when they see the ropes because they start to walk over

and can't understand why. We say, "There is a honu right there." They still keep looking with a weird look on their face, like "What?!" And then they gasp and see it (just looks like a rock). We can educate them on which turtle it is and why they do this and that they are the only honu that do it.

We also let people know we keep records about which turtles have come up on the sand. The papers get sent to NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) for the database of Laniākea beach honu.

We volunteers are on the beach all day watching the shoreline to see if any honu are trying to come on the sand, and when they do, we will ask people to step away so the honu can come up to bask. When the honu are in the water, we ask if people can give them space (10 feet in and out of the water).

When a honu is coming up on the beach, we keep watch to see where it is going to lay down and to keep people away so the honu does not get scared and go back into the water instead of getting its rest that it needs. When it gets to its spot, then we look to see any battle scars (like half flipper, cracked shell, numbers, etc.) to help ID them. We also look at the scale pattern on the side of their faces. Each scale pattern is unique to each honu, like a fingerprint for humans. We have a book that has all the pictures of scales and front of honu and the back of the honu for the 36 basking honu we work with. We keep notes on the honu with a basking sheet/log (example: L-4 Olivia Dawn 2:10pm - 6:20pm), which shows which honu and what time they came up and

when they went back in the ocean. While we are doing this, we are letting people know the honu's name/ID and the honu's story and why they come up to bask and any other facts they should know.

People don't understand that the Hawaiian green sea turtle coming up on the beach and basking is a new behavior that was first observed at Lāniākea in 1999. Also, they are wild animals and can bite. So, if you are swimming too close to them or you have the color of their food (limu/seaweed and sea grass, which is in different shades of green, brown, and red) they can bite you. If they just don't want you around them, they can bite. They do see colors, and hear sounds, too. Also, the surfers use them as a warning that bigger predators (sharks) might be around and they should be thinking of getting out of the water.

I'm so happy that Mālama i nā honu was one of the recipients for HMSA's Giving Tuesday. The money will help get a tracker that will show more data for the honu when they go 500 miles to lay eggs and 500 miles back to the north shore of O'ahu. The organization will also get more materials for new volunteers and school kids when we go to schools for outreach. I'm glad I could do that for this group, because I have gotten a lot back from them – public speaking, grateful that I live in Hawaii, grateful and humble that the honu and other wildlife let me be there to help them, and sharing and meeting people from all over the world that just come to see a honu or two.



***Janis Honda (Underwriting)** volunteers for Mālama i nā honu, an organization dedicated to protecting Hawaiian sea turtles through education, public awareness and conservation, all in the Spirit of Aloha. Last year, through Janis' nomination, Mālama i nā honu was one of the nonprofits selected to receive a donation from HMSA in recognition of Giving Tuesday. Read on to learn about Janis' experiences and thoughts about volunteering for this nonprofit.*

Photo description (above): Janis was presented with a patch blanket for her 4000+ hours on the beach. The blanket was the first the group has given to anyone. Janis is in the middle with Debbie Herrera (volunteer education coordinator) and Don Porter (president, fund-raising chair, board member).

EMMYLOU KIDDER

Hi! My name is Emmylou Kidder and I'm a member of Mālama i nā honu on Kaua'i. I moved to the island in spring of 2022 and was introduced to the organization by my neighbor Kathy, who let me tag along with her for her shifts. I quickly fell in love with the honu and have been an official volunteer since last November!

I have a degree in biology and my work with wildlife has taken me to beautiful marine habitats all around the United States, including my home state of Virginia, Maine, Alaska and now Hawai'i! I currently work as a



seabird technician for an ecological consulting company called Archipelago Research & Conservation. We specialize in seabird colony creation, management and monitoring for 'A'o (Newell's shearwaters) and 'Ua'u (Hawaiian petrels). Additionally, we

partner with local utility companies to assess and reduce seabird collisions with infrastructure, such as powerlines. I also volunteer with Save Our Shearwaters, an avian rescue and rehabilitation organization.

Participating in Mālama i nā honu has been such a great way for me to connect with the Kaua'i community. I'm fascinated by the ties between Hawaiian culture and endemic wildlife, as well as the local commitment to protecting our wild spaces. I'm very passionate about environmental education and science communication, so I love interacting with guests at Po'ipū Beach to teach them about honu conservation. I believe that people need to have positive experiences with nature to inspire them to take action to protect it. I'm so grateful for our Mālama i nā honu 'ohana and I can't wait to meet more of you at the beach!



ZOOKEEPER

Tales

**LYNDSEY
BYRNE**

This issue, we're going to look at a member of my favorite animal group (other than sea turtles, obviously...) primates! I recently switched jobs and now work at the Fort Worth Zoo as a primate keeper. In future issues I'll continue to talk about animals I've worked with in the past and presently, but the colobus monkey is a primate I've worked with at both zoos. Here's a little bit about them!

First off, you may think their name is a little odd if you've never heard it before. Well since they are monkeys, they have thumbs. However, colobus monkey thumbs are so small that they're not actually functional as



thumbs. The word "colobus" comes from the Greek word for "mutilated" because the thumb is more like a nub. They do have thumb toes though, as you may be able to see in the picture I took of Theodora hanging out. (lower left) These medium-sized monkeys live in the treetops of central Africa. They forage high in the forest canopy almost all day, skillfully jumping from tree to tree. Their diet is dominated by leaves, which are high in a tough-to-digest material called cellulose. Because of this, they have 4 stomach chambers (like a cow) to make sure they can process all the necessary nutrients.

A troop of colobus monkeys usually has 5-10 individuals consisting of one male, a few females, and their offspring. In contrast to the adults' black and white coloring, infants are born completely white! Females other than the mother will help take care of the baby, a behavior known as alloparenting.

Thankfully, colobus monkeys are not currently threatened or endangered! This may be because they can adapt to different types of forests. However, their



overall habitat is at risk due to deforestation. One way we can help to keep their habitat healthy for future generations of monkeys is to buy responsibly sourced paper products when we need them. Companies that are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) will have this logo on the back. If you see that, you can be confident that the product was made from a responsibly-managed forest. That's just one way to help keep colobus monkeys thriving!



Hello, Mālama i nā honu! This is Joshua Byrne, a zookeeper from Fort Worth, Texas and a student of all things living. I've been granted a spot in the newsletter today for a topic very near to my heart, and it's one I hope will inspire you in the ongoing challenge to conserve our favorite animals.

Today's efforts to protect and teach people about the honu are built on years of research, planning, and testing. Not only that, but also the appreciation of the turtles' positive, significant presence in our environment and Hawaiian culture. Spreading the word about the beauty of the honu has brought all kinds of people from being naïve or indifferent to supporting the cause of conservation. All animals, as irreplaceably unique denizens of the world, deserve such appreciation – but so many creatures still fall beneath the notice of both conservation workers and the general public.



Yellow-Faced Bee



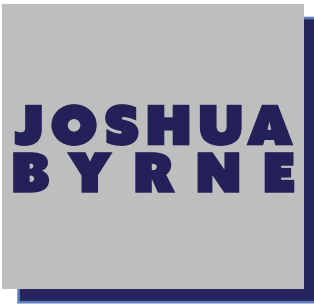
Orangeblack Damesfly

alteration and destruction, climate change, overuse of pesticides, and introduction of nonnative species can affect insects in many of the same ways as birds, reptiles, fish, or mammals.

Fortunately, more and more people around the world are discovering the importance of protecting insects. Their small size and usually quick reproductive rates bring great potential for conservation, as thoughtfully restoring habitat can help their numbers bounce back in rapid and rewarding ways. Some of the most ardent insect conservation is already taking place in Hawai'i! The stories of the yellow-faced bees (*Hylaeus*), orangeblack damselfly (*Megalagrion xanthomelas*), and flightless stag beetles (*Apterocyclus*) are still in motion. By taking a moment to learn about the insects around us, we not only can enjoy a new aspect of nature, but also can make a tangible difference for our home planet.



Flightless Stag Beetle



Insects are the most significant animal presence in nearly every terrestrial habitat, with a literal million described species. In Hawai'i alone, there are over 6,000 species which live nowhere else in the world. With this overwhelming diversity, insects are responsible for pollination, recycling nutrients, feeding other animals, controlling plant abundance, enriching soil, production of medicine, and surely more ecosystem services we have yet to learn about!

Despite their importance, insects tend to fall in the "nope please get rid of it" category for most people, especially Americans. It's often a surprise that they are even animals, let alone that any could be threatened with extinction. However, the threats of habitat

Hao`okanaka, later Hao

by Joe Murphy

Many current volunteers have never seen, or even heard of Hao, or Hao`okanaka as she was originally named. She was a prolific basker and a staple of our highest basking years. This is her story.

At 2:10 pm on September 13th, 2010, Mālama nā honu (now Mālama i nā honu), saw what was to be a major upturn in basking that contributed greatly to the all-time record for annual basking occurrences on the beach at Laniākea in 2011 of 1,239. On that day, a turtle to later be named Hao`okanaka and then ultimately have its name shortened to Hao, came ashore to bask for the very first time. She (we didn't know that at the time as the young turtle had not reached adulthood) stayed over 4 hours, past sunset, then was up early the next morning around 9 o'clock.

Due to her relatively prolific early basking schedule, it quickly became apparent that this turtle was intent on joining our o`hana. A famous local surfer named Andy Irons had recently passed away so the organization decided to honor him by bestowing his nickname, "Ironman" (in Hawaiian, of course...hence Hoa`okanaka) on this new turtle. Unfortunately, when NOAA determined a couple years later that the turtle was a maturing female, "Ironman" was no longer appropriate! Wanting to retain the honoring of Andy, and quickly rejecting Iron Maiden because it was also the name of a medieval torture device, it was decided to just shorten the name to "Iron," hence the name "Hao" which has been retained to this day.

On the beach, she really had a person-

ality, strange and irritating though it was. Most turtles haul out, find their spot on the beach, close their eyes and rest. Some are always on the move, changing position, changing orientation, going back toward the water to get wet, moving back up to the beach to stay dry. Hao interacted but in a pretty offensive way.

When there was already a turtle established in a spot on the beach, she would crawl up behind it and bite the tail or flippers...and keep up the annoying activity until the other turtle moved. And then she would probably follow it and start biting again. This could go on for some time until the other honu gave up and headed back to the water. Very few turtles chose to weather the assault. Oakley was probably the most tolerant, almost no turtle fought back.

Almost! When JP was a fairly new basker on the beach, Hao came up behind him (he was still a sub-adult and didn't know the protocol) and started biting his tail. He obviously took offense and deluged Hao with one flipper of sand in the face after another until she stopped! He threw a lot of sand! It was a great day for the o`hana!

Hao`okanaka quickly became the organization's second most frequent basker behind Brutus, hauling out of the water over 100 times in every 12 month period from the time she began coming out at Laniākea for over 4 years through August 2014. Basking over 100 times in a 12 month period is a rarity. In the history of MinH only 7 turtles have ever done it. "Old Timers"

Brutus and Kuhina did it regularly

(and of course, Hao) but others only occasionally. Hao did it in her first 12 months here and then consistently for the next 3 whole years. WOW!

In what seems like a strange coincidence, only 5 months after Brutus disappeared completely from Laniākea, Hao's basking frequency plunged over 80% and has never recovered.

Prior to October 2014, Hao had never missed a single month basking from the time she first hauled out on to the beach in September 2010. Since then, her record has been one of extended hiatuses. That started with an absence from the beach for 6 months that began in October 2014.

After that, things got more complicated. On September 5th, 2015, she hauled out of the water with a severely damaged shell from a collision with a boat. NOAA treated her with antibiotics, patched her damaged shell and returned her to the water at Laniākea 3 days later. Volunteers were asked to pay close attention to her rear flippers as she exited the water in the immediate future to make sure they were not affected by her injury. Initially, we were somewhat worried as Hao didn't return to the beach for almost 2 weeks. When she did, thankfully, there was no sign of impairment. But...by the end of the month, she had disappeared again! This time for only 3 months.

In June, 2016 she began a 9-month absence. Starting in June 2017, she took leave from the beach for 14 months. Three months later, she undertook a 31-month hiatus, her longest so far.

Continued on next page

That ended in May 2021 when she stopped by for 102 days and basked 87 different times on 67 different days (2 out of every 3 days

she was around)...and hasn't been seen since for over 17 months. If she stays true to form, we'll see her again, but as her hiatuses

seem to be getting longer each time, possibly not for over another year yet. Keep watching for her!



Hao, 2013, Pre-Boat Strike



Hao, 9/25/15, Post-Boat Strike Treatment from NOAA



Hao, 2017, She only basked 5 times in 2017, three times in March and 2 times in May, then went on a 14 month hiatus.



Hao, 2021, return from the 31 month hiatus



SURVIVING NESTING SEASON:

A LETTER TO THE FUTURE NESTING TEAM MEMBER



by Sadie Hausman

Being invited to the O'ahu Turtle Nesting Team after months of volunteering at Laniākea Beach has been my greatest joy as a volunteer with Hawaii's native wildlife. It is also the biggest commitment of time, thief of sleep, source of sand in my Subaru, and pain in the hip.

As I hit snooze on my alarm, I remind myself the best time to walk a beach is at sunrise, when the tracks are fresh. A busy beach erases evidence under the footprints of visitors, and going early allows you to really enjoy a peaceful experience with the sunrise and any other wildlife you might encounter. We find basking turtles, monk seals, birds, and sometimes interesting sea life at the tide line. I once returned a larval eel to the water! And if you are really fortunate, you could even witness a honu during the nesting process or see hatchlings emerging. While we don't stay out waiting to watch these things happen, you really don't know what you might run across. One volunteer even found a turtle in need of rescue. Your likelihood of being present for one of these special events increases with every hour spent and mile walked.

As exciting as the prospect of nesting season is, there are many uneventful days, too. Only a small percentage of Hawaiian green sea turtles nest here. The number may be increasing with conservation efforts, but it is still so small that our volunteers can go many days and many miles without seeing a nest. Know that

those days are still providing valuable data. Our commitment to collecting this information is critical to the long-term understanding of how the habitat is being used, or not. Whether you commit to one day or seven, your regular weekly contribution is important and appreciated. If you aren't seeing turtle activity on your beach, don't be discouraged! Appreciate the beauty of the scenery and the other wildlife you come across. Look forward to the end of the season when you will likely participate in a nest excavation. It's like opening a long-anticipated gift and the surprise is always exciting.

By the end of the 2022 season, I had walked 162 miles and picked up 70 pounds of trash in 175 hours. There were days I felt too tired or too busy to walk my beaches, but I was continually motivated by both a sense of responsibility and a fear of missing out. In the end, I learned so much and saw some truly amazing things. After the last nest was excavated, the feeling was bittersweet. It was time to rest again, for us and our turtles, until we begin again in the spring—refreshed!

So here it is, springtime again. If you are considering accepting your invitation to the O'ahu Nesting



Nesting female

Team, here are some tips to help you fulfill your commitment:

1. Only commit to the number of days per week you KNOW you can do. It is better to start slow and then pick up extra days later in the season if you find you have the time and energy. Remember you will also still be doing two days at Laniākea each month.
2. Start a listening list to pass the time. There are lots of free podcasts out there and you can get free audio books from the library.
3. Get to know your team. Find out who else walks your beach(es) and start a text group. That way you can easily reach out to each other if you find you need help covering a shift for things like illness or travel. You can also share exciting updates and funny finds. (I found FOUR full beers on my beaches, and yes, I drank them later to celebrate nests successfully hatching. YOLO!)
4. Record your experience. Keep a calendar or journal or photo album because this is one of the most exciting opportunities of your life.

I am so grateful for my experiences on this team and I'm sure you will be, too. It has been an absolute privilege to give my sweat and tears to this project (no blood—yet) and I know these days I'm living here are the good old days that I'll be talking about years from now. Welcome to the team, and I hope to see you on the beach!



Nesting female returning to the water

mālama i nā honu

Do you have suggestions for our newsletter? Maybe you have a great picture from the beach or a fun story. If so, please contact Debbie Herrera by email at ***kuuipo4kc@yahoo.com***.

Reference Honu Whisperer.

Thanks for reading and we'll see you at the beach!

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