

SINCE NINETEEN-HUNDRED



"THE VOICE OF CONSERVATION"

March 26, 1975

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Dear George:

Many thanks for your letter with enclosures and the beautiful photograph of the seal and green turtle.

The Galapagos trip went well. I surveyed the entire coasts of three or four islands and now am in a position to draw up a pretty thorough map of all of the nesting areas in the archipelago. I didn't get a great deal of tagging done (and what we did was made pretty uncomfortable by the heavy rain that fell almost every day--very rare for Galapagos), but a girl from the San Francisco turtle society stayed on after we left and got a fair amount of tagging done on Baltra.

I have never seen green turtles basking on land in Galapagos, despite many weeks of sailing around the islands looking at shorelines, tagging turtles, etc; and the local residents I have talked to don't report having seen the activity either, at least in recent years. I believe it would be safe to say that basking is no longer practiced on the islands, though as you mentioned there are some old references indicating that the turtles may once have basked. Possibly heavy tourist visitation to islands such as Bartholome, where I believe they may once have basked, has discouraged them from the habit.

By the way, I do remember reading of basking sea turtles on Kharg Island, one of the oil-terminal islands in the Persian Gulf. The account was in a oil company glossy publication that I read a few years ago in a doctor's waiting room in Surinam, and I don't have a reference. But if you wanted to follow it up, perhaps contact with the environmental decision of one of the eager-to-please major oil companies might help.

Galapagos sea lions are still plentiful in the islands, and often bask

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on beaches used at night by nesting turtles. However, I have not seen any kind of interaction between the animals, even though they may be seen swimming in the same areas during the day. One incidental observation that I have not yet rationalized is that Galapagos beaches tend to be good for either marine iguanas or sea turtles, but not often both. Possibly the shallow nests of marine iguanas would be destroyed by nesting turtles, so they tend to live (and nest) elsewhere.

The 1959 National Geographic photograph of a Galapagos green turtle does not show the typical plastral coloration; all of the hundreds of adult greens I have seen in the islands had some degree of grey infusion ventrally, though the strange "yellow turtle" that I mentioned in my Journal of Herpetology paper does have an orange-yellow plastron without dark pigment. I believe that must have been the kind shown in the National Geographic Magazine photo.

There is a group of loggerhead taggers who are trying to design and get produced a better turtle tag. There are a dozen or more outfits tagging turtles in the southern states, and they would probably be able to justify a combined order for the minimum number of a new tag. Let me know if they come up with anything.

Enclosed is a copy of a recent issue of our Florida Audubon Magazine. The green turtle shown on page 33 (unnumbered) is from Galapagos (a mature female on the nesting beach). The coloration is not unusual, but dorsal pigmentation is extremely variable in the archipelago.

All best wishes,



Peter C. H. Pritchard, Ph.D.  
Vice President

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Enclosure