

Rare nest of sea turtle hatchlings rescued

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HILO (AP) — A Hawaii family discovered a rare nest of olive ridley sea turtles on the Big Island before alerting experts, who said the hatchlings are not normally encountered in the area.

Jeremy, Jen and Kian Van Arkel found about seven hatchlings stuck in rocks and driftwood debris on a beach in the Kau area on Feb. 3, the Hawaii Tribune-Herald reported Tuesday.

The family alerted the University of Hawaii at Hilo Marine Option Program Sea Turtle Response hotline and leading team coordinator Jen Sims

expressed surprise at the find. "I knew it was something rare, right off the bat," Sims said.

Olive ridley sea turtles are a threatened species under the United States Endangered Species Act.

The only sea turtle species nesting on the Big Island is the hawksbill variety, which typically nests between May and November. Most green sea turtles travel to the northwest Hawaiian islands to lay eggs between May and August, Sims said.

"I certainly didn't know they were olive ridleys, and I've

never seen an olive ridley nest nor hatchlings before," Sims said. "So when I saw the pictures, I knew they didn't look right."

Lauren Kurpita, former director of the Hawaii Island Hawksbill Project, advised the Van Arkel family to carefully move the hatchlings closer to the water if they were unable to navigate through debris.

The family spent hours ensuring the safety of the turtles, combing through debris and locating stranded hatchlings before moving them further down the beach.

The Van Arkels helped

about 20 young turtles as hatchlings continued to emerge from the nest.

Kurpita arrived nearly three hours later and excavated the nest, unearthing three dozen more turtles trapped by rocks.

While olive ridley sea turtles are known to inhabit Hawaiian waters, Sims said most in the Pacific Ocean nest in Central America with females. Solitary nesting events are rare.

"The fact that this turtle nested in Hawaii instead of its normal nesting spot is really unusual," Sims said. "We just don't see it here."

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