

Title: Fire in the turtle house: the green sea turtle and the fate of the Ocean

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Author: Osha Gray Davidson

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To order: 250 West 57th St., Suite 1321, New York, New York 10107, USA Fax: +1 212 397 4277,

E-mail: publicaffairs@persusbooks.com

This work attempts to synthesise all that is known and postulated regarding Green Turtle Fibropapilloma (FP) from its initial discovery in the New York Aquarium in 1936 to current epidemics and aetiological and epidemiological research. Although I am not always a fan of popular scientific writing, I enjoyed reading this book and completed it in a single reading on a long train journey. It is well written, easy to read and one that all turtle biologists should expose themselves to. If nothing else, it adds a human element derived from interviews with the author that breathes more life into an area of the scientific literature. One finds interesting thumbnail sketches of the physical appearance, behaviour and background of some of the main players in the research story such as Balazs, Jacobson, Herbst and Ehrhart who many of us will only know from their authorships.

The book is well researched with no major technical errors or inaccuracies. Occasionally, I felt that author was running away with the shock-horror element of FP, forgetting to set it in the context of the other major threats to green turtles around the world. The soundness of the work as a review is no doubt testament to the great degree of input of a number of specialists acknowledged. However, one small yet consistent problem with scientific writing from the USA which diminishes its utility in a global sense is the failure to use SI units for temperature, distance and weight; surely at least converting to metric units in parentheses should be considered? Even young people in Britain, the country which exported these imperial measures, no longer use inches and pounds.

The book is structured as a prologue and 13 short relatively discrete chapters with a bibliography and a useful index. In addition, some interesting plates are included but, as with the bibliography, their usefulness is limited by the lack of reference within the text.

The prologue sets the scene in Hawaii and Florida before chapter 1 outlines the initial discovery of FP and

chapter 2 introduces the life and work of one of the most prolific of sea turtle researchers, George Balazs. This is a remarkably personal and interesting account which all who have met this man or read his work should read.

Chapter 3 and 4 are more general. The author tries to convey the impact humans have had upon species such as the passenger pigeon, Steller's sea cow and the green turtles of the Caribbean. In looking at the reduction of turtles in the Caribbean from historical levels it reviews the harvest at Bermuda, Miskito Coast and Key West. A major criticism here would be that the author appears to accept, without question, the accounts reported in the arcane historical literature. Folklore has fishermen as the great users of hyperbole (lies) but why not sailors and explorers? Using interesting examples the author then discusses fundamental ecological and conservation principles such as the shifting baseline syndrome, habitat loss leading to extinction, human population growth and species loss, overfishing and the emerging threats of invasive species and disease.

Chapters 5-9 outline, in approximately chronological order, how the current epidemics around the world were discovered and research into understanding them has progressed. This takes the reader from Hawaii to the Cayman Islands to Florida; the three locales where most has been learned about this frightening disease. Accounts are given regarding early epidemiological studies which gave insights into the multifactorial nature of the disease and the fact that, regardless of the aetiological agent, immunosuppression is likely also to play a role. The author digests what is a large body of literature admirably well into a highly readable summary.

Chapter 10 outlines the concept of pathogen pollution and the recent outbreaks of morbilliviral diseases in seals and dolphins, white band disease in corals and builds the case that human influence is the root cause of a marine metademic.

Chapter 11 and 12 outline emerging information on toxic dinoflagellates and their potential effects on human health. The reader is drawn to the coincidence of toxic dinoflagellates with FP in the Indian River Lagoon system in the USA. Additional discussion is made of the fact the incidence of FP appears higher in areas more densely populated by people. Preliminary work on the possible immunosuppressive role of biotoxins produced by dinoflagellates with pertinence to FP is considered.

Chapter 13 seeks to round off the work in a positive, almost misty eyed way but personally, upon reading the

book I was left being both impressed and frustrated. I was impressed at the perseverance of the few involved with unravelling the riddle which is the disease, yet frustrated as to the distance they have yet to travel. We wish them well and look forward to the book which reviews how the definitive understanding and control of FP were achieved.

It appears that this book has lead to the formation of a charitable organisation:

<<http://www.turtlehousefoundation.org/>>.

The Turtle House Foundation has as its primary purpose is to provide support for those fighting FP. Principle funding currently comes from a share of the profits from the book. The Foundation is currently in the process of incorporating and seeking non-profit status when it hopes to accept donations. More information can be gathered at the website above or contacting <info@turtlehousefoundation.org>

Reviewer: Brendan J. Godley, Editor, Marine Turtle Newsletter, (E-mail: mtn@swan.ac.uk)
