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HPU HOSTS 3RD ANNUAL SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION WORKSHOP

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Individuals committed to sea turtle conservation and research came together at HPU for the university's 3rd annual sea turtle workshop.

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Fiji.

Balazs and Work, who have served as the International Union for Conservation of Nature co-chairs of the marine turtle specialist group for Oceania over the last several years, have worked together for over 25 years on sea turtle issues.



Workshop presenter Jared Underwood, Ph.D., U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, talks about the trashed Tern Island turtle stranding tragedy.

“Thierry and I recognized the need for people to come together, working toward a common cause,” Balazs said. “We spoke with representatives of the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, and in 2018, facilitated a sea turtle workshop in Fiji.”

After the workshop in Fiji, they thought why not host a sea turtle workshop in Hawai‘i? They did just that, joining forces with HPU Dean of the College of Natural and Computational Sciences (CNCS) Brenda Jensen, Ph.D., organizing the first annual workshop held in 2020.

Protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, sea turtles are vulnerable to threats, including fisheries bycatch, loss and degradation of their nesting and foraging habitats, entanglement in marine debris, vessel strikes, and in some areas, the excessive hurting of turtles and the collection of eggs for consumption.

On October 6, 2023, nearly 300 individuals - researchers, students, resource managers, and the general public - committed to sea turtle conservation and research came together at Hawai‘i Pacific University for the third annual workshop entitled “Stranding Research and the Conservation Value to Diverse Communities of Oceania.” Balazs, Work, Jensen, and HPU CNCS staff member Jeanne Manzano and Jon Gelman, Hawai‘i Marine Animal Response President, organized the 2023 workshop.

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From left to right are the 2023 workshop organizing committee members: Brenda Jensen, Ph.D., HPU Dean of the College of Natural and Computational Sciences (CNCS); George Balazs, Golden Honu Services of Oceania and retired NOAA sea turtle biologist; Jeannie Manzano, HPU CNCS staff; Jon Gelman, Hawai'i Marine Animal Response President; and Thierry Work, DVM, USGS National Wildlife Health Center Honolulu Field Station project leader.

The workshop day began with Jensen welcoming the participants to the workshop and HPU. Ethan Souza, a natural resources manager at Maunalani on Hawai'i island, led the group members who joined hands in a circle, delivering an *oli* (chant), E Hō Mai, signifying the request to gather knowledge.

Over 20 workshop presenters from across Hawai'i, the continental U.S., Asia, and the Pacific delivered talks on various topics related to sea turtles. The presenters included a high school student dedicated to studying green sea turtles after seeing the effects of fibropapillomatosis, a tumor-causing disease, while diving in Kaneohe Bay. Another presenter, an HPU alumna who earned a bachelor's degree in marine biology, works as the field operations manager for Churamura Sea Turtle Conservation in Okinawa, Japan. Brian Stacy, Ph.D., Veterinary Medical Officer within NOAA's National Sea Turtle Program, delivered the keynote speech; Stacy works extensively with sea turtle stranding networks within the U.S. and abroad.

"On behalf of HPU and the College of Natural and Computational Sciences, it brings me great pleasure to collaborate with scientists, students, educators, and community citizens with a shared interest in sea turtle conservation and research through this annual workshop," Jensen said.

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