



# By the Numbers: The Annual Migration of Green Sea Turtles in Hawai'i

*September 26, 2017*

Many green sea turtles travel hundreds of miles across the Hawaiian archipelago from foraging to nesting habitat every year.



Can you imagine a 1,200-mile commute? Every year, many green sea turtles (or honu as they are locally known in Hawai'i) make the 1,200-mile (1,931-kilometer) round-trip migration from foraging habitats in the main Hawaiian Islands to reproduce and nest at French Frigate Shoals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and then swim back again.



*Green sea turtles bask along the shores of French Frigate Shoals, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (Photo: NOAA Fisheries/Marylou Staman).*

Since 1973, biologists with PIFSC's Marine Turtle Biology and Assessment Program have also made the annual trip to remote French Frigate Shoals to monitor nesting activity. This summer, the field biologists started monitoring sea turtles in May and worked tirelessly for four months (usually at night) to count nests, tag nesting females, and count how many hatchlings emerge from nests. Hatchling information provides a measure of reproductive output—important information needed to more accurately assess the status and health of the population.



*Green sea turtle with etched number on its shell in non-toxic paint on the shores of French Frigate Shoals, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (Photo: NOAA Fisheries/Marylou Staman).*

Program staff tagged every nesting female they encountered (called “saturation tagging”) and carefully etched a number on each turtle's shell. Turtles are now returning to the main Hawaiian Islands with these numbers on their shells. The public has a unique opportunity to act as citizen scientists to record numbered turtles and gather information to help better understand foraging habitats, migration, and distribution.

If you see a numbered turtle:

1. Keep a respectful distance of 10 feet (3 meters).
2. Take a photo (without disturbing the turtle).
3. Call or email NOAA to report the turtle’s number and location.

Call NOAA at: 888-256-9840 or email: [RespectWildlife@noaa.gov](mailto:RespectWildlife@noaa.gov)

This menu-based phone number can be used to report sightings or emergencies for sea turtles, monk seals, dolphins, and whales.

*All photos taken with research permit.*

*Last updated by [Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center](#) on January 12, 2023*