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Green Turtle — *Chelonia mydas*  
Green turtles are unique among sea turtles in being mainly herbivorous. They make regular long-distance migrations of as much as a thousand miles or more between their nesting beaches and pastures of sea grasses or algae. For centuries, the species has been heavily exploited for its excellent meat, and many colonies have been destroyed. La tortuga verde es una especie herbivora, que hace largas migraciones entre sus playas de anidacion y sus pastos de plantas marinas. Hace siglos ha sido explotado por su excelente carne, y muchas poblaciones han sido completamente destruidas.  
Photograph by George H. Balazs, French Frigate Shoals, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.  
Text by Archie Carr.

STRETCH  
SEA TURTLE RESEARCH EXPERIMENT  
THERMAL CORRIDOR HYPOTHESIS

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Hello and Aloha President Brotherson,

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is George Balazs and I have worked with sea turtles professionally in Hawaii and throughout the Pacific since 1973. My wife Linda and I lived in Paea at PK 26.5 for 7 months in 1964. The experience changed our lives forever. We have lived in Hawaii ever since. I have visited Tahiti often over the years to donate my time and knowledge of turtles to the people of French Polynesia. I am a strong supporter of the cultural and traditional rights of indigenous peoples.

I will be in Papeete 13-20 January 2024. I would like to meet with you in person for 20 minutes to talk about honu and the native people deeply linked to them. I am available to go to your office anytime, at your convenience, from Monday January 15th, through Saturday January 20th.

With Best Regards and Appreciation,

George Balazs

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# MON LIEN PERSONNEL AVEC LES TORTUES VERTES D'HAWAII ET DE POLYNÉSIE FRANÇAISE, 1963-2016

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1964 Paea Tahiti – Lagoon harvest for dinner. Happily, a small honu missed that meal due to my poor aim as a 21-year old novice spear fisher.



1991 Scilly Atoll – Rene Tuputu and family members hand-capturing a male honu for traditional dinner.



1991 Scilly Atoll – Rene Tuputu extended family and guests.



2006 Bora Bora – Mating pair of honu captured for satellite tracking. Project conducted by SPREP and PF Government Miri Tatarata.



2010 Bora Bora – Honu petroglyph symbol of Tahitian power carved into stone of ancient marae temple.

La restauration des populations de tortues vertes dans les îles Hawaïennes durant les dernières années <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/16285718/0> a fait l'objet de plusieurs publications scientifiques et grand public, mais aussi avec une note toute particulière est illustrée dans le "Le Livre de Honu" et par «Turtle Trax» sur le site [www.turtles.org](http://www.turtles.org), créé par Peter Bennett et Ursula Keuper-Bennett. L'histoire passée et présente des tortues vertes de Polynésie française (appelées aussi «honu») est moins connue. Le lien fort et traditionnel entre les polynésiens dispersés sur les îles éloignées et les «honu» est très profond, diversifié et intense. Ce lien est sans doute le même que celui qui existait et ou continuera d'exister encore à Hawaii, où les populations de tortues continuent de progresser et où les décès par présence de tumeurs tendent à décroître. Mon lien avec les tortues vertes est né en Polynésie française en 1963 et s'est renforcé tout au long des 43 dernières années par des événements successifs et principalement au sein de l'archipel hawaïen. En 1963, ma femme Linda et moi avons vendu le peu que nous possédions, vidé nos comptes en banque pour quitter la Californie et tenter l'aventure parmi les polynésiens de Tahiti. Notre voyage a commencé par une semaine à Hawaii avant de se poursuivre par l'arrivée à Tahiti, dans le tout nouvel aéroport de Papeete. Avec l'aide des résidents, nous avons vécu dans la zone de Paea, alors peu développée. Puis notre visa expirant, nous avons du rentrer en cargo en Californie, en passant par Nuku Hiva aux Marquises et par Panama. Quelques mois plus tard, nous étions de retour à Hawaii, pour construire notre vie, une famille et une carrière, toujours d'actualité.

J'ai vu ma première tortue marine à Tahiti, elle aurait fini dans mon assiette si je n'avais pas été aussi médiocre en tant que pêcheur au fusil harpon. Puis, plus tard, j'ai vu ma deuxième tortue marine, lorsque Linda et moi marchions sur la plage à Bora Bora, la tortue était alors un animal de compagnie, enfermée dans un parc flottant sur le récif. Je rêve encore très souvent de la Polynésie française, ses habitants, ses îles et ses tortues, tout comme les Polynésiens rêvent encore la nuit de leur ancêtre qui leur dit où la tortue pourra être attrapée le lendemain sur le récif. Depuis 1964, je suis revenu 6 fois en Polynésie mais pour de courts séjours, 5 fois sur invitations pour collaborer à des programmes de recherche, et une fois avec Linda pour un court stop lors d'une croisière vers Sydney. La visite qui m'a touchée le plus est celle de l'atoll de Scilly en 1991 avec René Taputu et sa famille, René était considéré comme le meilleur chasseur de tortue de la région. Ma dernière visite a été en Octobre 2010, à l'occasion du «Premier symposium sur les tortues marines en Polynésie française» où j'ai revu René Taputu 20 ans après. Je sens que le lien fort qui lie les Polynésiens et la tortue persiste, sur une base durable. Le statut des populations de tortues et la durabilité de leur utilisation doivent être examinés en fonction du contexte culturel des îles. Je me sens engagé à jouer un rôle pour contribuer à renforcer le lien intime entre les populations et les tortues marines.



1976 Miami, Florida – IUCN Marine Turtle Farming Task Force.



1977 Necker Island.



1973 – Prominent honu nesting site of East Island at French Frigate Shoals in the remote Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.



1973 – First of 43 annual field camps to monitor and tag nesting honu at East Island.



1974 – Honu nesting at East Island.



2010 Lanikaes, Oahu – Honu foraging near shore in abundance.



2012 Hookipa, Maui – Numerous honu coming ashore at sunset for their nightly sleep.



# A LIFELONG RELATIONSHIP WITH HAWAIIAN AND POLYNÉSIE FRANÇAISE GREEN TURTLES 1963-2016



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The story of green turtles being restored in the Hawaiian Islands during recent times has been heralded in several scientific and popular publications, but perhaps most eloquently in "The Book of Honu" and on the Turtle Trax web page <[www.turtles.org](http://www.turtles.org)> authored by Peter Bennett and Ursula Keuper-Bennett. Less known to most is the past and present complexities of the green turtles of French Polynesia, where they are also called honu. The bond between the native peoples and honu of the far-flung islands of French Polynesia continues to be deep-rooted, diverse, and intense, likely as previously existed in Hawaii, and may happen again, as the honu population of Hawaii proceeds ever upward and the tumor disease continues in decline. My relationship with green turtles began in French Polynesia in 1963 and evolved, through a series of lucky events, into a 43-year endeavor focused in the Hawaiian Archipelago. In 1963, my wife Linda and I sold our few possessions, emptied our small bank account, and left California to experience life in the South Seas among the people of Tahiti. Our journey there included a week in Hawaii before flying to the newly-opened jet airport near Papeete. Through the kindness of strangers, for seven months we subsisted in the then-outlier District of Paea in Tahiti. Visa limitations eventually returned us to California on a cargo ship via Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas and Panama. A few months later, we were back in Hawaii building a life, family, and careers that endure to the present.

I saw my first sea turtle in Tahiti, a juvenile honu that would have been dinner if not for my poor aim as a spear fisher. Later, walking the shoreline of Bora Bora with Linda, I saw my second sea turtle kept as a pet in a pen on the reef flat. I regularly still dream about French Polynesian people, islands, and turtles, as the natives still dream at night when an ancestor tells them where a turtle can be caught the next day on the reef. Since leaving in 1964 I've returned to French Polynesia on six short trips, five by invitation to assist with sea turtle studies, and once with Linda for a brief stop on a cruise vacation to Sydney. The most memorable visit was in 1991 to remote Scilly Atoll to work with Rene Tuputu and family, Rene being one of the most knowledgeable turtle hunters of the region. My most recent visit was in October 2010 as part of the "First International Symposium on Sea Turtles in French Polynesia" where Rene Tuputu and I met again after 20 years.

There is great potential for traditional ties with the honu to persist, on a sustainable basis, among the people of French Polynesia. The status of the stocks and the sustainability of the harvest need to be examined within the cultural context of island communities. I am committed to playing a role in aiding both the honu and the people in their interwoven relationships.



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