

## Hawaiian sea turtles journey 'home'

by George Balazs, NOAA

The green turtle (*Cbelonia mydas*), called honu in Hawaiian, can frequently be seen feeding on marine plants in shallow coastal waters. Following decades of over-exploitation, the population has now shown encouraging signs of recovery after receiving protection in 1978 under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Elsewhere in the Pacific and worldwide green turtles continue to be threatened with extinction from excessive hunting for food, including commercial use.

As adults, green turtles in Hawaii migrate once every 2-5 years across hundreds of miles of open ocean to breed at isolated French Frigate Shoals (24 °N, 166 °W), the mid-point of our island chain. During the summer months, females come ashore at night to excavate nests and deposit eggs in the sandy islets at this special location. In the daytime, both the adult male and female turtles bask peacefully in the sun along the shoreline.

Newly hatched turtles emerge from underground nests after the eggs incubate for about two months. The hatchlings then swim to sea and drift at the surface in oceanic currents where they feed on small invertebrate animals. After growing to dinner-plate size, they show up mainly in the near shore island waters extending from the Big Island to Niihau. Here they graze on algae and seagrass and sleep on the bottom under protective coral ledges.

As vegetarians, green turtles grow slowly taking more than two decades to reach an adult breeding size of 200 pounds or more. Although numbers have clearly increased during recent years, green turtles living at certain areas in Hawaii continue to be threatened by a disease that forms fibrous growths on the eyes, neck, flippers and mouth. A mysterious virus that only affects sea turtles is believed to be the cause of this often fatal affliction. Research is underway to find ways to prevent or control the disease.

The hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), or honu'ea, is also native to Hawaii, but there are very few of these critically endangered turtles remaining. Nesting occurs on several small, unprotected sand beaches on the Big Island, Maui, Molokai and Oahu. A recent study, using earth-orbiting satellites to track hawksbills, suggests that the adults nesting at Kamehame, in the Ka'u district of Hawaii, live on the opposite side of the island along the rugged Hamakua coast. Hawksbills are known to feed heavily on sponges, an invertebrate that is toxic to most other animals. Sometimes hawksbills themselves are poisonous when people eat them.

**THE JOURNEY HOME** – Photo by renowned Big Island Wildlife Photographer Victoria McCormick. In the summertime when the sun is at its highest, some adult female Hawaiian green sea turtles and most of the males begin their ocean journey back to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands' nesting sites. Some swim as far as 800 miles or more in their pilgrimage to complete the journey of the Honu. Visit [www.victoriacmccormick.com](http://www.victoriacmccormick.com) for more honu images.

The leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) is a regular visitor to Hawaii's offshore waters, but does not nest on our beaches. The leatherback is the world's largest turtle and can weigh up to 2000 lbs. Leatherbacks seen in Hawaii are thought to originate from breeding sites in Mexico, Costa Rica, or Malaysia.

Sea turtles have always been a traditional part of the Hawaiian culture, as elsewhere throughout Polynesia and other islands of the Pacific. Hawaiian legend relates that a mystical turtle named Kauila makes her home at Punaluu Bay on the Big Island. Kauila could transform herself into human form and watch over the children as they played along the shore. The people in this region are said to have loved Kauila as their guardian, and for her spring of pure drinking water that flowed into the bay. Even today, some people of Hawaiian heritage revere sea turtles as their amakua, or personal family deity.

Turtle watching as a part of eco-tourism has become an increasingly popular activity, second only to whale watching. Dive tour operators frequently promote sea turtles as the major attraction of underwater sightseeing. Watching turtles from shore has also become popular, even from high rise hotels.



Painting by Herb Kane

The mystical turtle named Kauila makes her home at Punaluu Bay on the Big Island. Kauila could transform herself into human form and watch over the children as they played along the shore.

ALOHA FESTIVALS



2005

P. 67 & 30

# Nā Honu Hawai'i

Aloha Festivals theme celebrates

## The Spirit Within

a tribute to the Hawaiian  
life of land and sea

Attend Big Island events

August 27 thru  
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OFFICIAL BIG ISLAND PROGRAM GUIDE

## Aloha and mahalo from Gloriann Akau

*Big Island Festival manager Gloriann Akau with members of the Halau O Kekubi at the rim of the volcano after last year's Royal Court investiture.*



Photo: Charles R. West

Aloha and welcome to our 2005 Big Island Aloha Festivals. We have a great lineup of events that stretch from Waimea to Kea'au. Our activities begin August 27 with the dramatic royal court investiture at Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park and end September 25 with a performing arts extravaganza at the sixth annual Queen Lili'uokalani Festival.

This year's theme, "Na Honu Hawai'i," is a special one. I was taught that the honu represents humility and we must learn to be humble. It's important to ask how to do things and to ask permission to do them."

## KonaViews ...proud to support the Aloha Festivals

### Aloha kakou!

KonaViews magazine is pleased to again produce this informational and colorful 32-page program guide to all the 2005 events on the Big Island. Since the goal of KonaViews is "spreading Aloha" — what does it better than the Aloha Festivals!

Mahalo nui loa to the advertisers for their participation (see page 29) and to the KonaViews team: Writer Fern Gavelek; designer Carol Wright; office manager Debbie West-Wu; photojournalist Charles R. West (who covered many of the events last year); and contributing photographers Carol Wright, Fern Gavelek and Michael O'Brien.

Mahalo to Hagadone Printing for a print job well done and to Islandwide Distribution, Everett Sweet and Lani Olsen's volunteer team for distributing the guide islandwide.

We also want to gratefully acknowledge the members of our community who make this celebration of the culture of our islands possible — dedicated volunteers, enthusiastic attendees, and this year's presenting sponsors, Hawaiian Airlines and Hawaii Tourism Authority.

Show your kokua — buy an Aloha Festivals ribbon!

*Tovi Daly, KonaViews publisher*

## Aloha Festivals theme celebrates Hawaiian life of land and sea

The 2005 Aloha Festivals theme is Na Honu Hawai'i "The Spirit Within." It pays tribute to the Hawaiian life of the land and the sea by focusing on honu or sea turtles. It honors the symbolism of honu in Hawaiian culture, the belief of honu as an ancestral guardian and the responsibility to respect the ocean and practice marine conservation.

Honu have lived since the ages of dinosaurs. "They are the true ancients of Hawai'i, having dwelled in our islands' ocean waters for millennia," reads a statement by Aloha Festivals. Honu symbolize longevity, peace and the spirit within for Hawaiians, while they are beloved throughout the world as creatures of peace, hope, humility and love.

Honu are also 'aumakua, ancestral spiritual guardians of Hawaiian families. Hawaiians maintain personal, intimate relationships with their 'aumakua and feel their ancestral guardians nurture and love them. Similar to grandparents, Hawaiians feel their 'aumakua keep them on the right path (pono).

Keen observers of nature and protectors of the sea, Hawaiians also care for honu, ensuring their return to land to bear their young in the sands of their birth. Now endangered and bordering on extinction, this year's theme points out that it is the responsibility of all people to ensure the honu's survival for all generations.

*See inside pages for more about the honu and the theme design.*



## 2005 Big Island Aloha Festivals

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### PROGRAM GUIDE STAFF

#### PRODUCTION EDITOR

Tovi Daly

#### FEATURE WRITERS

Fern Gavelek Carol Wright

#### DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Carol Wright

#### PHOTOGRAPHERS

Charles West Carol Wright Tovi Daly

Fern Gavelek Michael O'Brien

Michael Darden Aloha Fest

#### PRINTING AND PRE-PRESS

Hagadone Printing

#### COVER PHOTOS by Charles R. West

(except Kupuna Dancers by Carol Wright and Pau Princess by Tovi Daly)

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