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The Editor  
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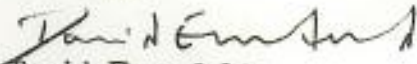
Dear Sir:

John McLean (letters, Oct. 24) writes that sea turtle "farming" is an example of species preservation for profit, and pleads for a relaxation of the regulations that currently keep all sea turtle products out of the U.S. We disagree -- not with the idea of preservation for profit, but with the idea that sea turtle "farming" has anything to do with preservation. In fact, these "farms" (which rely heavily on wild-caught animals to maintain their egg production) are more likely to be the last nail in the coffin of the green turtle and perhaps other species of marine turtles.

There are many reasons why sea turtle "farms" are not the conservation boon they claim to be, but one is overriding. In order to sell their products, these "farms" must stimulate world-wide demand for expensive sea turtle products, and there is no effective way to prevent poachers from then capitalizing on this demand and filling it with wild-caught animals from rapidly dwindling stocks.

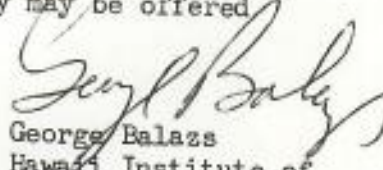
Unlike alligators, which recover rapidly from persecution and which live in the U.S. where protection is possible, sea turtles take as long as 30-40 years to reach breeding age, are scattered among many countries and in international waters, and are very vulnerable to poaching nearly everywhere. Conservationists cannot fight the demand for turtles stimulated by turtle "farms", nor can we fight all the misinformation about sea turtle conservation put forth by those trying to sell "farmed" turtles.

Perhaps by some time next century, some sea turtle stocks will have recovered to the point where limited exploitation for luxury markets will be possible. For now, we hope that the U.S. Government will keep its wise ban against the importation of "farmed" sea turtle merchandise, and we urge American citizens to refrain from buying sea turtle products -- meat, soup, oil, shell, eggs, or leather -- legal or illegal, wherever they may be offered for sale.

  
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