

FRENCH FRIGATE SHOALS, 1984: GREEN TURTLE HATCHLING MARKING

This work was conducted by Gail Peiterson, Robin Westlake, and Susan White and was performed from 26 July to 8 August 1984, under Special Use Permit HWN-8-84.

A total of 2,542 green turtle hatchlings were collected from East, Whale-Skate, and Trig Islands. All of these were single foreflipper tagged with titanium tags. Tagged hatchlings were released at East, Whale-Skate, and Tern Islands.

Approximately 450 hatchlings were dug out of previously erupted nests. All but 200 of these were released untagged because they appeared to be very weak animals that would probably not survive. The other 200 were retained for captive tag retention and autograft studies.

Autografts and double flipper tags were applied to this group of 200 hatchlings on Tern Island before departure to Honolulu. Approximately 30 hatchlings died the night before departure, more died in the morning prior to flight time. By the time the plane reached Honolulu and the turtles were delivered to the Aquarium most had died and all but 12 died in the next few days. We suspect these were initially weak individuals having never emerged from their nests and that the handling, shipping, and temperature stresses were more than they could handle.

Before attempting to perform this tagging study again we have decided to wait and see what the Pacific sea turtle recovery team may recommend in this regard.

Many of the titanium tags misfired or broke when applied, so further work needs to be done on the hatchling tag itself.