



University of Hawaii at Manoa

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Mr. Douglas B. Gordon
Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries
Fisheries Management Laboratory
7-13 Donald McLean Street
Newtown, Wellington, New Zealand

Dear Doug:

I was sorry to have missed participating in the PEACESAT discussion of July 11. I was, however, able to listen to a tape recording that my wife Linda made of the greater portion of the session. It was nice of you to go to the trouble of bringing Charles McCann to the station. I would have liked to talk with him as I am familiar with his turtle papers.

If you have the interest and time, I certainly think that there are several aspects of sea turtle biology/conservation that would be valuable to investigate in New Zealand. First, I suspect that the occurrence of leathery turtles in your waters is important and probably far more common than most people outside of New Zealand realize. Interestingly enough, Charles' papers suggest that juvenile leathery turtles (500 lb range) are the most abundant. Also, he states that "young leatherys occasionally strand along 90 mile beach". I wonder what he considered as being "young". If this means say from 50 to 500 lbs, I would regard that as being very important as such sizes are not regularly found at any location in the world (or at least its not reported in the literature). What is needed is for someone (you) to compile a list of all known strandings and sighting (including date, location, etc.) for New Zealand. Perhaps special emphasis should be placed on this 90 mile beach, although I really don't know where its located in relation to your residence. A compilation of this sort would really be good information, and certainly publishable. If feasible for your present work position, I hope you'll give it serious consideration. I would of course assist you in any way I can (literature search, etc.). By my way of thinking, the second important aspect for New Zealand sea turtles would be to determine the status of the Kermadec Group. I don't even know if these islands are inhabited. Oliver (1910) stated that between Jan-March aggregations of feeding green turtles were present by Sunday Island. I don't presently have the entire paper, but it can be found in Trans N.Z. Inst. On my next trip to the main campus library I will look it up. Do green turtles still occur in the Kermadec Group and, if so, in what numbers and in what size ranges. If they do, in fact, seasonally migrate in and out, where do they go and where do they nest?

Mr. Douglas B. Gordon

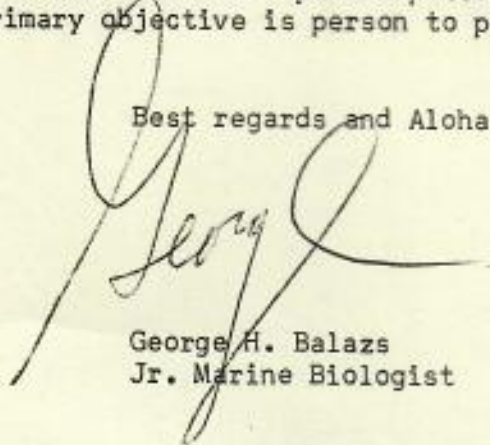
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Last, but not least, I believe that it would be valuable to determine to what extent New Zealand serves as a consumer nation of sea turtle products. I recall that you mentioned seeing canned turtle soup in the store. Perhaps you could find out the brand name and country of origin. The next step would be to examine import records in order to extract any turtle products. That is assuming, of course, that such canned fishery products show up in the records. Again, I just don't know to what extent New Zealanders prize turtle soup. I do know that its a pretty big deal in London (and many U.S. areas). Through the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973 (which replaced the 1969 Act), all international and interstate commerce and taking of hawksbill, leathery and Atlantic (Kemp's) ridley sea turtles is prohibited. For the past two years there has been a proposal pending to also give protection (under this Act) to the green, Pacific ridley and loggerhead). Unfortunately, its still pending. However, a number of State governments (including Hawaii) have separate laws that to lesser and greater degrees protect these three species.

I hope that I will be here for the next PEACESAT talk set for early August. My field work in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands is entirely dependent on transportation provided by the military. This is on a space available basis, so often I must leave on several days notice.

I also hope that the next PEACESAT talk will somewhat less formal and rigid than the first one in which I participated. Agendas are all good and fine, but to me the primary objective is person to person communication.

Best regards and Aloha,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "George H. Balazs". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

George H. Balazs
Jr. Marine Biologist