

November 22, 1976

Mr. A. J. Mence
International Union for
Conservation of Nature
1110 Morges
Switzerland

Dear Tony:

I want to take this opportunity to provide you with information on the recent nesting and hatching of captive Chelonia at the commercial display facility, Sea Life Park. In view of the scarcity of such reports, I thought it would be appropriate to disseminate specifics at the earliest possible date. Widespread publicity may possibly result from this occurrence, therefore it will be advantageous for you to be knowledgeable of the facts. The attached pages present some of the relevant data collected. During the past few weeks, I have sent this information out to a number of marine turtle researchers around the world.

Sea Life Park, located on the island of Oahu, first opened in 1964 and all turtles on display have been obtained from Hawaiian waters. It is suspected that five of the 12 adult green turtles now at the facility have been in captivity since at least 1967. Unfortunately, no long term records exist on acquisition dates, original sizes, or any other individual details. In December, 1973 I placed identification tags on the turtles and have since been periodically taking measurements, retagging due to corrosion problems, and providing advisory assistance on a cooperative basis.

The history of reproductive activity at Sea Life Park, as I have been able to piece it together, can be summarized as follows:

1. From at least 1967 to December, 1972 turtles were held in a display pool with an accessible artificial sand beach. Sometime between 1967 and 1968 nesting took place on this beach, but no hatchlings resulted.

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2. After December, 1972 the turtles were permanently moved to a different display pool with no sand beach. In the spring of 1973 a copulating pair was observed. This was followed within several hours by egg deposition directly into the water by the female involved in copulation. The eggs were removed, rinsed with fresh water and buried in the sand, but development did not take place. A copulating pair was again observed a few days later, but it could not be determined if the same animals were involved. Immediately following copulation, the female was transferred to a pool with a sand beach. Within several hours egg deposition again occurred directly into the water. Attempts to incubate these eggs also resulted in no development.
3. In December, 1973 a small sand beach and sloping exit ramp were built into the turtles' display facility.
4. During 1974 and 1975 copulation was not observed, although some minor mating attempts by males may have occurred in 1974, and a few moderate attempts took place in 1975.
5. Active, aggressive attempts by males to copulate were first seen in 1976 at about the same time that emergence and nesting activity started (mid-June). Attempts continued until at least late July, but at no time were turtles observed locked together in actual copulation. I personally saw a number of these attempts, and in each instance the female clearly rejected the male.

I would be interested to learn of any comments or interpretations which you may have on this case. In the next few months, I plan to prepare a short paper on these observations and findings for publication in the Journal of the Hawaii Audubon Society.

Sincerely,

GEORGE H. BALAZS
Jr. Marine Biologist

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