

May 26, 1976

Letter to the Editor:

During the past year and a half readers of Honolulu's two daily newspapers have been exposed to no less than five articles dealing with the controversial subject of commercial sea turtle farming. Conflicting information has often been presented, therefore its not hard to understand why many people are confused over the whole issue. To add substantially to this confusion, on May 7th KGMB-TV news presented a glowing report on turtle farming which neglected to even mention that the subject is controversial. Before anyone in Hawaii runs out and starts investing hard-earned dollars in such a scheme, I want to briefly summarize the existing situation and put it into proper perspective.

Many may recall the numerous claims made by promoters of the world's only sea turtle "farm", Mariculture, Ltd. located in the Caribbean on Cayman Island. In essence, the claims stated that such an operation is 1) beneficial to the conservation of the world's declining sea turtle populations; 2) biologically feasible; and 3) economically successful. Along with Dr. Archie Carr and other knowledgeable sea turtle scientists, I have disputed these claims as being unfounded, unsubstantiated and, and the most part, just plain hog wash. Let us see how the claims hold up against the evidence.

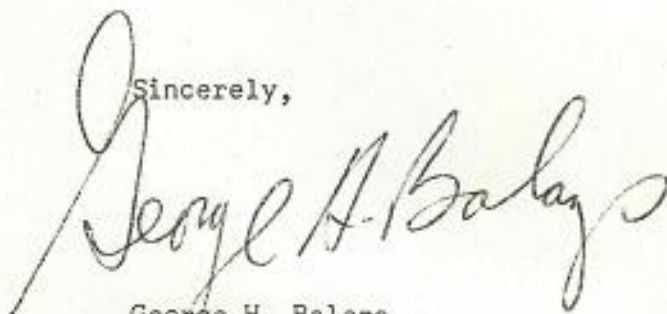
With respect to conservation merits, in November of 1974 the respected International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN- Switzerland) sent a task force of turtle specialists to Cayman Island to critically examine the Company's contentions. Investigations found that Mariculture, Ltd. was guilty of making claims and statements that were misleading and demonstrably incorrect. The conclusion was reached that the Company's operations can not be regarded as being in the conservation interests of sea turtles.

With respect to biological feasibility, that is, the actual capability of successfully farming turtles, the same international task force found that the viability of the Company's turtle culture operation has yet to be proved, as indeed has that of turtle farming in general. Large numbers of eggs must now be removed from natural nesting beaches, and the outlook seems poor for achieving self-sufficiency in the production of young. Furthermore, ^{disease} and mortality problems are considerable, and the type of high protein feed that turtles will accept is incredibly expensive and inefficient.

With respect to economic success, the evidence is even more damaging. In May of 1975 Mariculture, Ltd. went bankrupt. This came after seven years of efforts, millions of dollars in expenditures, and numerous promises and predictions that did not prove true. Just two months ago a German corporation purchased Mariculture, Ltd from the bankruptcy trustee. All total, the stockholders of Mariculture, Ltd. ended up with absolutely nothing- a loss amounting to \$3,500,000. Unfortunately, many of these investors were American citizens who had believed the Company's promotional literature and other glowing "success" stories heard about turtle farming.

The lesson seems clear to me. Perhaps at some date in the distant future sufficient scientific information and expertise may be developed to make turtle farming a realistic and acceptable proposition. However, for the present time its just another pie-in-the-sky scheme that doesn't make good sense.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "George H. Balazs". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

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