

DEAD TURTLES

Beware high surf when setting nets

Concerning the five accidentally killed turtles (and some scared fishermen): Unless

proved otherwise, these turtles were caught by accident by noncommercial fishermen. The greatest tragedy was *the loss* of the turtles, and *because of* federal and state laws, they could not be taken home for food.

The net was probably intended to catch lobster, and was set in an area sensitive to surf conditions. The high surf increase that night probably made it unsafe to pick up the net.

The law states that nets must be checked at least every two hours and must not be set in any one location for more than four hours. The fishermen may have checked their net within the required time and found the net destroyed by the surf. Seeing the dead turtles tangled in the webbing, and scared of the legal consequences, they may have left the scene without notifying anyone.

Let this incident raise a flag of caution to those who set nets in ocean reef areas subject to surf condition changes. Surf can change on the north shores of all islands in a matter of one hour during October through April. To better your chances of not losing your net again or endangering turtles, call 973-4383 for an updated surf report before you set your nets.

George Downing

Endangered turtles die after snared in net

By Lynda Arakawa
Advertiser Staff Writer

Five endangered green sea turtles died after becoming entangled in a 300-foot-long fishing net snarled on a fragile coral reef near Waialeale Beach Park on Oahu's North Shore.

Other turtles may also be caught in the net, but authorities last night could not confirm how many.

The turtle deaths were discovered yesterday morning when local residents reported them, said Filiesha LeRand, who works for the National Marine Fisheries Service.

When she arrived at the beach park, a state conservation officer had already brought the turtles to shore.

"The turtles were strung up on the beach," she said. "They
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Mike Ebina, conservation enforcement officer for the Department of Land and Natural Resources, disposes of a dead green sea turtle in a garbage bag held by Filiesha LeRand, who works for the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Gregory Yamamoto/
The Honolulu Advertiser

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were all entangled with nets around their necks and fins."

Five turtles died. Two caught in the net were released into the ocean, but there were others still entangled, LeRand said. She said she wasn't sure how many turtles were still caught in the net or whether they were alive.

"This is a symbol of what we're passing on to Hawaii's children," said Board of Land and Natural Resources Chairman Mike Wilson, pointing to the gray and salt-encrusted tur-

tles that were spread on the lawn in front of the Kalanimoku Building at a press conference yesterday afternoon.

The turtles were displayed in an attempt to draw attention to the plight of endangered species and the department's efforts to obtain more funding for enforcement activities.

The turtles are listed as both state and federal endangered species.

Wilson estimated the dead turtles were 10 to 15 years old. He said that turtles need to be at least 20 to 25 years old before they can reproduce.

"This is a generation that has

been lost in one fell swoop," he said.

The presence of the net was only discovered yesterday, and Wilson said it was still caught on the coral reef, damaging it.

Officials are trying to determine who owns the net. If caught, the owner faces federal penalties of up to a \$10,000 fine and/or a year in jail for each dead turtle. State penalties are up to \$500 and/or a year in jail for each turtle.

However, Hawaii's enforcement program is weak, and it's not often that someone gets caught, Wilson said.

State laws require net users

to check their nets after two hours, with the nets being in the water for no more than four hours.

Wilson said the dead turtles symbolize Hawaii's weak and underfunded Ocean Protection Program, which is at risk of losing \$410,000 to legislative cuts this year.

The board's ocean protection program is budgeted at \$6 million, including \$1.7 million added by Gov. Ben Cayetano to increase enforcement and aquatic research efforts, Wilson said. However, if the Legislature cuts \$410,000 from the governor's ocean initiative, the

board will lose 10 conservation enforcement officers. The agency employs 27 officers on Oahu, with about 100 officers statewide, Wilson said.

Flies scattered as state conservation enforcement officer Mike Ebina picked up a dead green sea turtle and put it in a garbage bag. After sealing the bag, he placed it in the back of a truck next to the other four bags.

"Amazing, isn't it?" Wilson said. "In a state like Hawaii you would think that we would have the protection to save (these turtle

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— MIKE WILSON
CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF LAND
AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Five green sea turtles found dead in net

The net's owner could face a large fine as well as a jail sentence

BY ROD OHIRA
Star-Bulletin

Five dead green sea turtles were recovered yesterday from a gill net found drifting about 100 yards offshore from Waialeale Beach Park on Oahu's North Shore.

"It's a real statement on the weakness of Hawaii's ocean protection program that people feel themselves free to let a 300-foot net drift as it keeps taking ocean life," said Michael Willson, Board of Land and Natural Resources chairman.

"Unfortunately, we are likely to see this kind of thing becoming more common if the governor's ocean budget gets cut by the Legislature this year."

The five turtles were juveniles, 10-15 years old.

Green sea turtles do not breed until they are 20-25 years of age.

Department information specialist Deborah Ward said the net was legal size, and no live turtles were found and released.



By BARRY MARKOWITZ, Special to the Star-Bulletin

State conservation officer Franklin Tomas looks over four of the five dead green sea turtles.

The department responded to a complaint from area residents and located the net at 9 a.m.

Fish and lobsters were also recovered from the net, Ward said.

Green sea turtles are a threatened species, Ward said.

Department enforcement officers are looking for the owner of the net, who faces a \$1,000 fine and a one-year jail sentence under

state law for killing the green sea turtles.

There is also an additional \$500 fine for each turtle killed. The federal penalty is a \$10,000 fine and one-year in prison.

Leeward

Authorities say man seized green turtle

State enforcement officers from the Department of Land and Natural Resources arrested and charged a 54-year-old Waianae fisherman with possession of a green sea turtle, a threatened species.

About 12:30 p.m., witnesses reported to Waianae Harbor-master William Aila that a man had caught a sea bird with a rod and reel while fishing near Waianae Regional Park and had placed the bird in the trunk of his car.

Aila said that the animal turned out to be a juvenile green sea turtle, measuring about 25 inches in diameter. Officers of the state land board arrested George Manuel on misdemeanor charges that carry a maximum penalty of \$1,000 and/or one year in jail.

The turtle was released at the harbor boat ramp. The animal, apparently in good health, swam away, Aila said.

After posting \$100 bail, Manuel was released from Waianae Police Station.

Earlier this month, five turtles were found dead in a net on Oahu's North Shore. State land enforcement chief Gary Moniz said his department has not received substantive information that would lead to an arrest.

A group of commercial *akule* (big-eyed scad) fishermen have put up a \$5,000 reward in that case. Anyone observing the taking of protected species is urged to call the conservation hotline at 587-0077.

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**Man faces fine, jail
for taking sea turtle**

A Waianae man was arrested yesterday for allegedly catching a green sea turtle at the Waianae Small Boat Harbor, according to the Department of Land and Natural Resources.

The department said the 54-year-old man caught the turtle off the reef area with a rod and reel.

He was putting it into his car trunk when he was approached by a harbor agent.

The juvenile turtle, measuring about 24 inches across and weighing some 50 pounds, was released back into the water in good condition after a hook was removed.

Under state law, the man faces a maximum penalty of a \$1,000 fine and a year in jail for taking an endangered species, the department said.

Reported by Star-Bulletin staff

POLICE

Friday, March 20, 1998

Q&A

WILLIAM KRESNAK

How laws protect sea turtles

Five green sea turtles were found dead this week after becoming entangled in a 300-foot-long fishing net snagged on a coral reef near Waialeale Beach Park on Oahu's North Shore.

Here's a primer on green sea turtles and the laws that protect them, based on information provided by the state Department of Land and Natural Resources.

Q: What is a green sea turtle?

A: The green sea turtle, or *honu*, is the most common of native Hawaiian sea turtles. They can live up to 100 years, grow up to 3 feet in length and weigh up to 400 pounds.

The green turtle is primarily vegetarian, eating algae or limu growing underwater on coral reefs and on rocks close to shore. Because of their diet, their body fat is green, which is how the turtle got its common name.

Q: What laws protect them?

A: Federal and state laws protect them from being harassed, disturbed, harmed, killed or kept in captivity.

Q: What are the penalties for violating the laws?

A: Maximum state penalties are a \$500 fine and/or a year in jail. Federal penalties go up to a \$10,000 fine and/or a year in jail. But federal law allows a potential exemption for commercial fishermen who accidentally capture turtles.

Q: What's the potential federal exemption for commercial fishermen?

A: Turtles accidentally caught in a net, for example, must be let go if they are alive. If they are comatose, they must be revived, if possible, before being released. If they are dead, they must be released from the net. All accidental captures must be reported to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

William Kresnak is the Advertiser Capitol Bureau chief.

Q: Where do they nest?

A: *Honu* breed on sandy beaches at night on sandy beaches at the high tide line. They nest three or four times during the breeding season, which lasts from early summer to fall, laying about 100 eggs at a time. Most Hawaiian green sea turtles nest at French Frigate Shoals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, about 800 miles from Oahu. The eggs develop for about two months.

Hatchlings, about 2 inches long, dig out of the sand over a period of a few days and head for water. Not many survive because they are a tasty snack for predators.

Q: Then where do the hatchlings go?

A: Little is known. But after a few years, they appear in their feeding areas around the main Hawaiian islands. Adult green sea turtles will migrate back to French Frigate Shoals to breed, and probably nest on the same beach where they were hatched.

Q: Are green sea turtles endangered?

A: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lists Hawaii's *honu* as a "threatened" species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, which means the turtle is likely to become endangered in the near future. The *honu* is protected by federal and state law.