



News Release

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NEWS RELEASE

June 23, 2010

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RESPECT OUR SEA TURTLES

It's Nesting Season in Hawai'i!

Summer is drawing near and with it is sea turtle nesting season! The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA Fisheries Service and the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Aquatic Resources ask everyone – locals and visitors alike – to respect our sea turtles.

The two species that nest in the islands are the green turtle (honu in Hawaiian) and the hawksbill turtle (honu 'ea in Hawaiian). Ninety percent of Hawai'i's honu migrate hundreds of miles to French Frigate Shoals – located in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument – to reproduce. The remaining honu are known to nest on coastlines in the main Hawaiian Islands. The honu 'ea nests primarily on the islands of Hawai'i, Moloka'i, and Maui. As a result, increased sea turtle activity, such as mating, in nearshore waters may be witnessed and more honu may be basking or resting on beaches.

If you see a honu or honu 'ea on the beach or in the water, please respect them and remember to:

- View sea turtles from a distance. Please do not approach or disturb mating, feeding, basking (resting) or nesting turtles. Provide them space and if they move away, please do not pursue them.
- Avoid shining bright lights on a turtle or nesting beach after dusk (e.g., flash photography, vehicle lights, exterior building lights, etc.). If you suspect that you may live near a nesting beach, please contact the Fish and Wildlife Service's Honolulu office at (808) 792-9400 to request information on "turtle friendly lighting".
- If you inadvertently hook a turtle, please remove as much fishing line as possible. Help to keep our reefs clean of derelict fishing gear and debris.
- If you see a turtle coming up a beach and start to dig a nest, or if you see hatchlings wandering, please immediately report this to the Turtle Stranding Hotline at (808) 983-5730.

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An animal that appears to be sleeping on the beach may be a basking turtle and should be allowed to continue to rest undisturbed. However, if you see an animal in distress with visible signs of injury, an animal that is bleeding or entangled in debris, or that has not moved for more than two days, it may need medical assistance. Please call the Turtle Stranding Hotline. To report suspected violations, please call the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) at (808) 587-0077.

Almost four decades ago, the sight of honu in nearshore Hawaiian waters would have been rare. Today, it is common to see honu feeding, swimming, and basking in the main Hawaiian Islands. The animals have been protected by the State and Federal government since the 1970s, when the harvest of juveniles and adults was banned, and nesting beach disturbance at the French Frigate Shoals rookery was reduced. The honu 'ea has also benefited from protections established in the 1970s. Although the honu 'ea population has not responded as positively as that of its cousin, hawksbill sightings are on the increase in foraging habitats, especially in water around Maui.

Mature honu females will nest every 2 to 3 years, laying approximately 3 clutches (nests); each clutch contains about 100 eggs. After hatching, baby turtles ride ocean currents, feeding and growing for approximately 6 years, until they are about 14 inches in length. At this age and size they return to settle in the nearshore foraging habitats of Hawai'i. Turtles will feed, grow, and mature in these reef habitats until they reach approximately 30-35 years of age. The turtles then undertake their first reproductive migration, back to the beach where they were originally hatched, thus continuing the cycle for the benefit of future generations. Adult honu, the largest of the hard-shelled sea turtles, can have a shell length of 4 feet and weigh 400 pounds.

Mature honu 'ea females nest every 2 to 8 years laying approximately 6 clutches; each clutch contains about 180 eggs. It takes anywhere from 15 to 40 years for a female to begin reproducing. Honu 'ea, unlike other sea turtle species, prefer to construct their nests under beach vegetation. This can be problematic in areas where the closest vegetation is located across a highway where they risk injury or death during the crossing. Adult honu 'ea have a shell length of 3 feet and weigh 250 pounds.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit us at <http://www.noaa.gov> or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/noaa.lubchenco>.