

# HAWKSBILL TURTLE RECOVERY PROJECT ISLAND OF HAWAII – 2006 SEASON HIGHLIGHTS

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**ALOHA HONUEA OHANA!** The 2006 nesting season is officially pau! We documented 12 mama turtles, six of which were newly tagged. From the 36 confirmed nests they laid, over 4,300 hatchlings safely reached the ocean. The first nest of the season was laid in mid-June and the last nest hatched out in early January. That's right, holiday hatchlings! For the past six months, over 40 diehard turtle volunteers tirelessly searched numerous sites along Hawaii Island's southern coastline for signs of hawksbill activity. Nests were found and protected at five beaches: Apua Point, Keauhou, Halape (all three are in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park), Kamehame, and Pohue Bay. Mother Nature threw us for a loop this season with high surf, pouring rain, tsunami warnings, and a huge earthquake. Despite the 6.7 magnitude quake that rocked the Big Island in October, all of the volunteers and nests were fine.



The beginning of the season marked the end of an era, when resource management legend Larry Katahira retired after 33 years in the National Park Service. His dedication, expertise, and vision are missed. Since Larry and friends started the program in 1989, 73 nesting turtles have been tagged, 618 nests have been protected, and over 67,000 hatchlings have reached the Pacific Ocean. CONGRATULATIONS LARRY!!!

**Apua Point:** The season started off with a bang when the first nest was laid here by a previously untagged turtle. A total of two turtles and five nests were documented at this rocky beach. During the hatchling season, volunteers got a surprise when they found 18 hatchlings in the naupaka heading *away* from the ocean during the afternoon! Since hatchlings are very sensitive to light, these hatchlings were likely heading towards the brightest visible light, the sun. On two occasions, fortunate backcountry visitors were treated to the experience of a lifetime, when they were able to witness hatchling main emergences! One of the visitors was a former volunteer from Hilo who had never seen a hawksbill during her time with the project. She was absolutely thrilled to witness over 40 hatchlings wiggle out of the sand and crawl to the ocean. As in previous years, the hatchlings required assistance from volunteers to make it over the rocky, cobbled shoreline, and through the roots and vines of the invasive Mauna Loa pea plant. Still, from the five confirmed nests, 522 hatchlings made it to the sea. One of the nests even had a 99% nest success, which is exceptional considering that the other four nests had an average success of only 56%!

**Keauhou:** Nesting activity returned to this secluded beach in the park backcountry for the first time since 2001. After not being seen for five years, the only turtle ever tagged here returned to lay three nests. She likely sneaked in another nest, although we missed seeing her lay the eggs. Volunteers woke up one morning to find turtle tracks and one fresh egg sitting on the sand; they dug a little ways underneath the egg and found the nest! However, it could have also been laid by a different turtle (from Apua Point or Halape) since individual nesting turtles can lay nests at multiple beaches within the same nesting season. From the four nests, 322 hatchlings successfully reached the ocean.

**Halape:** One turtle tagged in 2002 returned to lay three nests this season. Additionally, we suspect that she laid a fourth nest. This "possible" nest was confirmed when volunteers found ten hatchlings crawling to the ocean from that area. Throughout the season, volunteers educated backcountry campers on ways to minimize their impact on turtles. This was especially needed since one of the nests was located directly in

front of the campsites. Three of the four nests had success rates of 80% or higher, which are way above average for Halape! From the four nests, 485 hatchlings got a taste of the salt water they all yearn for!

**Kamehame:** Three turtles laid nine nests this season at what has been the most prolific hawksbill nesting site in the history of the Hawksbill Turtle Project. One turtle, originally tagged in 1993, returned after a six year hiatus to lay three confirmed nests. Another veteran mama laid four nests after not being seen for five years. The one newly tagged turtle at this beach was a notorious “false nester”, probably due to her inexperience. She kept volunteers on their toes all season, especially one night when she prospected thirteen times! On another occasion, three volunteers were kept up until morning, but were extremely lucky to witness two turtles nesting in the same night! High surf warnings and high tides combined to inundate nests numerous times throughout the season. Despite this, all but one of the nests managed to weather the storms and close to 1,000 hatchlings safely reached the ocean! We continued one of our primary missions to provide hands-on education to the community by taking a Boy Scout troop from Kauai and a class from UH-Hilo to Kamehame. The college students had the experience of a lifetime as they watched a hawksbill mama emerge from the surf and lay a nest with a full moon and clear skies above.

**Pohue Bay:** For the past two seasons, Pohue Bay has been the most productive hawksbill nesting beach in the Hawaiian Islands! Fourteen nests were laid by five mama turtles, four of which were newly tagged this season. There was a rare daytime emergence of 160 hatchlings, witnessed by children from Kau. Turtle recovery staff from the National Marine Fisheries Service witnessed a main emergence and excavated two nests. For two of them, it was their first time seeing hatchlings! Eleven of the fourteen nests had nest successes over 90%; one even had a 100% nest success, the first time that’s happened in several years! Over 2,000 hatchlings reached the ocean from this beautiful beach. In the past two seasons alone, eight nesting turtles have been tagged, 29 nests have been protected, and over 4,500 hatchlings have successfully made it to the ocean at Pohue Bay.

**Punaluu, Horseshoe, Koloa, Ninole, Kahakahakea, Awili Point, and Manuka:** Although no nests were documented at any of these beaches, turtle crawls and digs were observed at Punaluu, Koloa, and Kawa. Also, a live hatchling was found at Punaluu that likely swam down the coast from Kamehame. Although these beaches were checked for hawksbill activity, we could have missed nesting activity since we did not camp at them consistently. More personnel and funding are needed to properly monitor, survey, and manage nesting habitat on Hawaii Island.

**Special Mahalo to Larry Katahira for his 33 years of service to Hawaii Island’s Natural Resources and the 2006 Honuea Volunteers and Interns:**

Jeff Kutz	David Block	Caleb Dresser	Niki Endler	Brad Lovett
Stephan Classen	Matt Brown	Joanna Dombeck	Anne Farahi	Danielle Mckay
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Lauren Kurpita	Claire Catania	Kyle Davis	Matt Klasek	Brian Sogge
Wendy Acker	Aubrie Cook-Carnahan	Lucas Crowley	Eva Krivak-Tetley	David Taylor
Nancy Banh	Christina Cornett	Chelsea Dudoit	Jennifer Lee	Susannah Welch
Colton Metzler	Tucker Hirsch	Bradd Beil	Hillary Linsenbigler	Andrew Gottscho
Alex Hooker	Nina Roth	Shawn Okumura		

**Happy 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday and Mahalo to Minky Markiewicz!!!**

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