



2024 Honokanai‘a Honu Nesting Event

BACKGROUND

On May 15, 2024 Dawson contractors notified Ocean Program staff that they observed a green sea turtle digging a nest on the beach of Honokanai‘a (central area of the beach, above the high-water mark, in the ‘aki‘aki grass). The area was immediately marked and designated to eliminate all foot and vehicle traffic. In the following month five other nests were identified, all on Honokanai‘a beach within 100 yards of the original nest.

After informing NOAA and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service personnel, the incubation and hatching dates were calculated for the first nest. The earliest the nest would hatch would be July 14 (55 days from lay) and the latest the nest would hatch would be August 3 (75 days from lay). Program staff requested and was granted Commission approval to conduct excavation of known nest(s) once the last day of hatching had passed and with the presence of cultural supervision and direction. It was the suggestion of the Commission that Lopaka Aiwohi provide his cultural presence during the excavation. The purpose of the excavation was (1) to determine whether or not the nest was a “true nest” or a “false crawl” and (2), if it was a “true nest” then the excavation would determine the success/mortality rate of the hatchlings.

UPDATE

On Monday, August 12, 2024 a group consisting of: Dean Tokishi (KIRC), Caroline Sabharwal (KIRC), Christina Wine (KIRC), Lopaka Aiwohi (PKO), Nicole Davis (NOAA), Jamie Thomson (NOAA), Irene Kelly (NOAA) and Sheldon Plentovich (USFWS) conducted the excavation in Honokanai‘a of the first honu nest (#1) laid 83 days prior.

Results: -92 total eggs laid
-87 hatchlings emerged
-2 deceased hatchlings
-5 unhatched eggs (1 unknown embryo, 2 no embryo, 1 embryo 2cm diameter, 1 embryo 1cm diameter)
-95% success of hatching



On the morning of Tuesday, August 13, 2024 , it was discovered by chance that another honu nest had hatched the night before because of the hatchling track marks that were present. This nest (#5) was located toward the southern end of Honokanai‘a beach. This nest was excavated later in the afternoon when conditions would be cooler and less stressful to any hatchlings that may still have been in the nest.

Results: -71 total eggs laid
-69 hatchlings emerged
-2 hatchlings trapped in nest, uncovered and released
-100% success of hatching

NOTES:

- This is the first documented and confirmed honu nesting event on Kaho‘olawe.
- four other possible nests remain at Honokanai‘a beach. On Thursday, August 29 an aerial survey was conducted of Honokanai‘a via helicopter, with two low passes over the beach, no evidence of hatching was sighted.
- A female honu can return every four years to an area to nest.
- Generally, female honu will return to the area from which they hatched to lay nests of their own.
- It takes about 30 years for a honu to reach sexual maturity.
- Honu nesting period usually occurs between April to September.
- All of the excavations were conducted under a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service permit.

Endangered and Threatened Species Recovery Permit: ES39990
Version Number: 27



Photos above: May 15 honu nesting event at Honokanai‘a
Photos below: Aug. 12 excavation of nest #1





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Top Left: nest #5 hatching evidence of track marks. Top right: egg hatching count with 100% success
Bottom left: Lopaka Aiwohi assists with the excavation of nest #5. Bottom middle and right: Baby honu heading to open waters

