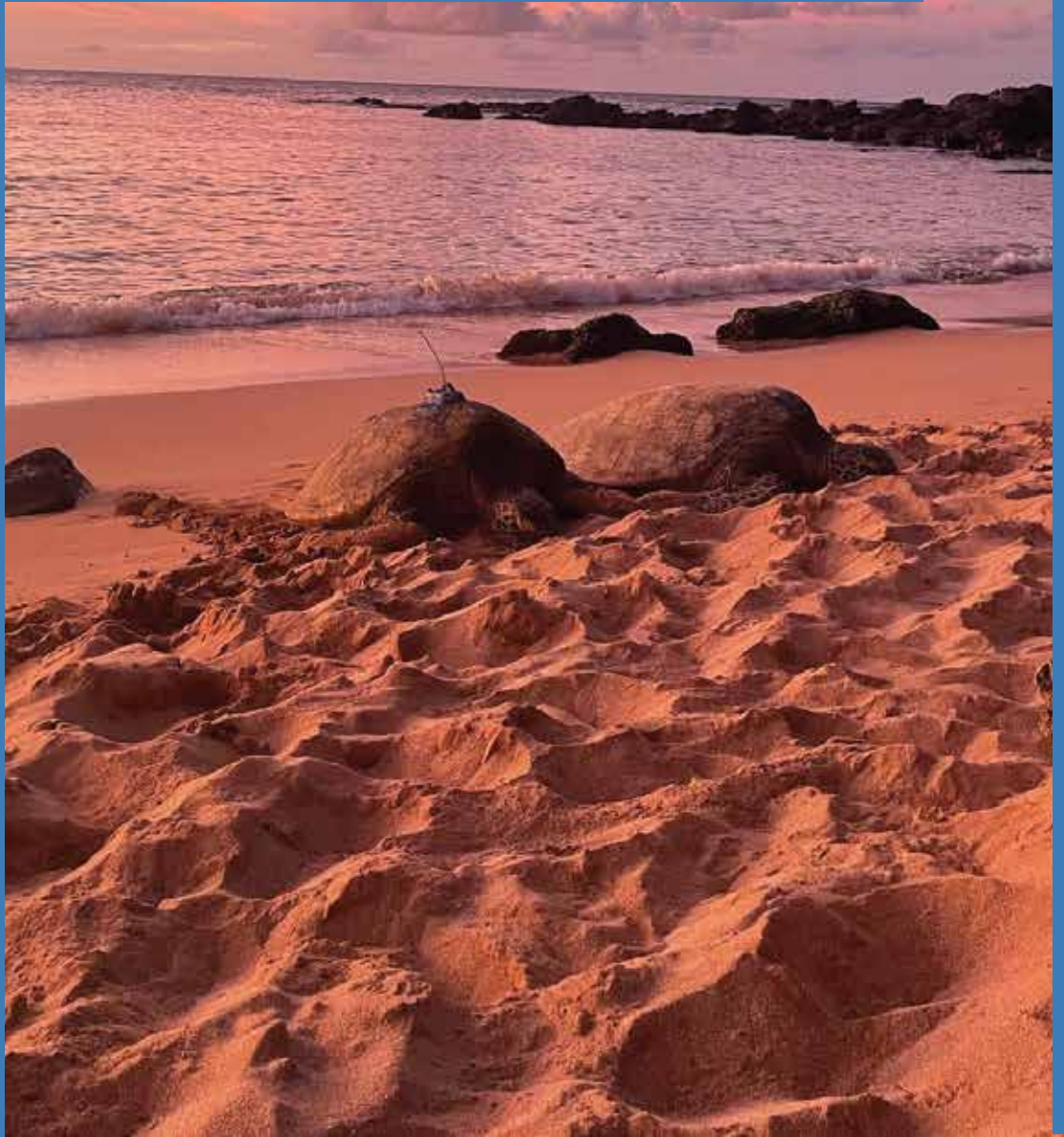


VOLUME 10 | ISSUE 1

# HONU WHISPERER

*mālama i nā honu*



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# ABOUT US

Mission: "To protect the Hawaiian green sea turtles through education, public awareness and conservation, all in the spirit of Aloha."



[www.malamainahonu.org](http://www.malamainahonu.org)



[www.instagram.com/malamainahonu/](https://www.instagram.com/malamainahonu/)



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# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## Summer Kickoff Event

Join us for a summer picnic SHELL-ebating our honu!

Marylou Staman will be onsite to share the latest on Lalo nesting. Mālama i nā honu will have tents set up at the main entrance.

Please bring your own chairs and drinks.

Sunday, June 29th

From 9 to 12PM

Ali'i Beach Park

Think Brunch!

Last names A-L bring a main dish

Last names M-Z bring a dessert or side dish.





# JACKLYN VO

## A Volunteers Journey

Aloha, Mālama i nā honu!

Imagine you're walking along the shoreline with only the stars illuminating the night sky. Hours pass by until you finally come across one sea turtle track moving inland. You carefully follow the tracks up the beach and into the shrubs, where you hear sand being thrown into the air. While trying to locate the sea turtle in the jungle, you ask yourself, "Where is this sea turtle going?" At last, you spot the mama nestled under a tree log, digging her body pit and egg chamber. You swiftly prepare your equipment and wait for the mama to lay her eggs.

Once she begins laying her eggs, you lay right next to her and begin counting her eggs while your partner is marking the nest. You think, "This is magical! I can't believe I'm here!" When she's done laying her eggs and begins covering the chamber, you insert ID tags to her front flippers, measure her carapace, and watch her return home.

This was my life back in 2024.

My name is Jacklyn Vo, and I had the privilege of being a research assistant with the Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC), Tortuguero. STC's main objectives are to monitor the nesting sea turtle population in Tortuguero, determine threats to nesting sea turtles, and evaluate hatchling success rate, along with a few others. Daily, we would do a morning track survey and a night patrol. When we weren't on the beach for patrols, we were educating tourists at the visitor center, engaging with the STC juniors, or conducting measurements in the lab. This experience changed my life and has taught me the importance of prioritizing community education to conduct meaningful marine research and conservation.

This experience nurtured a fiery passion for sea turtle conservation, and has led me to Mālama i nā honu, Oahu. I aspire to take the skills that I've learned at the STC and apply it to the Mālama i nā honu's conservation efforts in educating our communities and protecting the fascinating honu!





## ART MEETS CONSERVATION

### Louvre Abu Dhabi Sea Turtle Rehabilitation

Picture yourself standing in one of the most awe-inspiring architectural masterpieces in Abu Dhabi, gazing out at the glistening blue waters of the Arabian Gulf. You've just finished exploring the Louvre Abu Dhabi and its extraordinary collection of rare and priceless art—your heart is full, and your mind is at peace. Before you, a series of stone steps leads down to a large pool of water fed by the vast Gulf. As you descend, you see them: majestic sea turtles gliding gracefully through the water.

What you're witnessing is a powerful fusion of conservation and art. The Louvre Abu Dhabi is located on Saadiyat Island, right at the edge of the Gulf. The waters surrounding the museum have been designated the Saadiyat Marine National Park, established in 2014 and home to a diverse group of marine life including the endangered Hawksbill sea turtle.

With the museum's architecture blending beautifully into the sea, it became the perfect site for a sea turtle pre-release

program—a partnership launched in December 2022 between the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD) and The National Aquarium, where most turtle rehabilitation begins. The location serves as the final step in the recovery journey before these marine animals are released back into the wild.

Much like beachgoers who visit Mālama i nā honu, guests at the Louvre can now observe sea turtles in a natural setting and learn why these animals are essential to the ocean's ecosystem. This process, referred to as "re-wilding" by the EAD, includes training the turtles to feed and behave as they would in the wild—something visitors can witness firsthand.

According to a Louvre visitor, as of May 2025, there were ten turtles in the pool, including a loggerhead—a species rarely seen in UAE waters, according to The National. This innovative program is a true homage to nature's influence on art and a meaningful way to educate the more than 1.4 million visitors who passed through the Louvre Abu Dhabi's doors in 2024 alone. So, if you find yourself in Abu Dhabi, don't miss the chance to see not only world-class art but also the remarkable sea turtles before they make their way back to the sea.



# TORTOISES AND HABITAT CONNECTIVITY

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## Tracking the Sonoran Desert Tortoise

### Why it Matters

Spotting a Sonoran desert tortoise (*Gopherus morafkai*) in the wild typically sparks excitement with visitors of the Sonoran Desert. These seldom-seen animals are very important to the ecosystem. Desert tortoises are ecosystem engineers, creating and modifying burrows that many species use to escape the extreme heat.

As a long-lived species with slow recruitment (very few young survive to adulthood), the desert tortoise is vulnerable to human and environmental pressures. Chief threats include habitat loss and fragmentation, removal from the wild, disease, and more. In Arizona, tortoises are a species of special interest and a Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

Little is known about the tortoise population in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve or what factors might be affecting it. Understanding how human activities influence this species will help determine appropriate management actions to protect the tortoise and ecosystem in the Scottsdale McDowell Sonoran Preserve and beyond.

### The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy's Work

Through generous support from the Arizona Heritage Fund and with appropriate permits and training from the Arizona Fish & Game Department and the City of Scottsdale, the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy is studying the Preserve's tortoise population. Field work began in April 2021, continues. Just last year our 19 volunteer Citizen Scientist field leads and 44 additional volunteers contributed more than 1700 hours to the project: traversing some of the most difficult off-trail terrain in the Preserve every week. We've also engaged a diversity of external partners, students, and the public.

Over four years we conducted more than 20 field surveys to locate tortoises. We attached radio transmitters and GPS dataloggers to 27 tortoises and recorded more than 50 addi-

tional tortoises. The animals we tag are measured, marked, and given a health assessment. So far, the tortoises observed have shown no signs of disease, are well nourished, and do not appear stressed.

The small radio transmitters allow us to re-locate the tortoises. For the first three years, through spring and summer, every three weeks we swapped out the GPS dataloggers, which were providing half-hourly locations for each tortoise. Our volunteers manually recorded tortoise movements in nine locations across the Preserve every month in winter when the tortoises are in shelter and brumation. The small dataloggers and transmitters do not affect tortoise behaviors or movements and are removed at the end of the study.

Tracking desert tortoise movements provides us a better understanding of how tortoises are using the Preserve and what factors might affect their population. Information about this population also helps us understand trends throughout this species' range and how to best protect it into the future.



# HONU WHISPERER

Tortoises and Habitat Connectivity continued...



## What We've Found

Working off-trail we have had the opportunity to regularly observe other seldom seen species such as gila monsters (*Heloderma suspectum*) and black-tailed rattlesnakes (*Crotalus molossus*). We've witnessed some rarely observed tortoise behaviors: courtship and mineral mining (eating dirt to obtain minerals lacking in its plant-based diet). We have also found artifacts from the ancient Hohokam peoples and modern era ranching, which we left undisturbed and reported to the City of Scottsdale for further study.

We have found tortoises in the flatlands and up on the mountain tops, near trails or well off-trail. Most individuals regularly moved 100–200 meters in one week but stayed within about 5-acre areas. Some made longer-distance forays. Two juveniles made journeys of 2–5km off the Preserve where they were picked up by well-intentioned members of the public, turned over to the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and safely returned to the Preserve. Two other adults made long distance loops of more than 3km in a week, one skirting 11km around an active construction zone before returning to his home area. Tortoises were less active during the dry seasons and made larger movements during the summer monsoon. As



temperatures began to drop and the days shortened, they moved into over-winter shelters for brumation, where their metabolism slows and they rest until spring time.

Continued tracking will allow us to determine areas typically used by each individual or group, the overlap between those areas, short and long-distance movement patterns, and much more. We will also be able to determine any barriers to movement within the Preserve. From this information, the influence of natural and human factors can be teased out to help inform management decisions.

© McDowell Sonoran Conservancy





Top, left to right: Ruger, Henry, Kaiao  
Bottom, left to right: Chewie, Chewie with handler Kotoko

## THE TURTLE DOGS

Hawaii's Nest Detecting Pups

Sea turtle season 2025 has begun and this year we have a new tool in the toolbox to help us detect turtle nests: the Turtle Dogs of Conservation Dogs of Hawaii. Through a contract with the U.S Marine Corps, Country Canine LLC has subcontracted Conservation Dogs of Hawaii to help discriminate between real sea turtle nests and false crawls in Marine Corps Base Hawaii in Kaneohe. We also hope the dogs will help us determine how long after a nest is created that the nest is detectable by scent. As a female turtle lays her eggs, she also deposits a large amount of cloacal fluid that coats the eggs. It is this fluid that the dogs have been trained to indicate on. The four dog teams have been selected for their past experience in scent work.

Our oldest dog is Ruger. Ruger is a 10 year old Weimaraner. Ruger and his handler Sandi are one of our original volunteer dog teams on the invasive devil weed plant project and has been volunteering for the past five years. Ruger is an air scenting dog by breed but for this turtle project he's keeping his nose on the ground to provide an accurate read of what might be going on under the sand.

Henry is an 8-yr old Goldendoodle and has been doing

sport scent work since he was a pup. You would think he is an irish wolfhound with his flowing golden hair blowing in the wind as he looks out over Pyramid Rock beach. While Team Henry is a relative newcomer to the conservation field, they're putting all of their sport scent work skills to good use with sea turtle nest detection.

Kaiao is a 6-yr old Dutch Shepherd mix who is ball obsessed and will happily turn down hot dogs if he can work for a ball instead. He has been a proof of concept dog for CDH for many years. When CDH explores a potential new target species or project, we sometimes need to test the concept to see if it would easily translate into training additional dogs. From plants to rodents to ants, Kaiao has sniffed for them all.

Chewie is our newest and youngest pup on the team. He and his handler Kotoko took a sport scent work class and the rest is history. Chewie took to scent detection like a fish takes to water. Chewie and Kotoko are now working at the wind farms on Oahu, surveying for downed seabirds and bats. While Chewie is relatively new to CDH, his enthusiasm more than makes up for it!

# SYMPOSIUM

[ISTS Symposium announcement and info](#)

44<sup>th</sup> International Sea Turtle Society Symposium  
February 28<sup>th</sup> to March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2026  
Kailua-Kona, Hawai‘i, USA

**Aloha kākou!** On behalf of the International Sea Turtle Society (ISTS), we extend a warm and heartfelt invitation to the 44th International Sea Turtle Society Symposium (44th ISTS Symposium)—a global gathering of sea turtle biologists, conservationists, researchers, practitioners, and advocates from over 80 countries. For the first time ever, this premier event will take place in Hawai‘i, from February 28th to March 6th, 2026, in the stunning coastal town of Kailua-Kona on Hawai‘i Island.

## Why Hawai‘i?

As most readers of this publication know, Hawai‘i holds a deep and unique connection to sea turtles—known locally as honu—which are not only an iconic part of the islands’ marine ecosystems but are also deeply revered in Hawaiian culture. Despite this strong connection, the ISTS Symposium has never been hosted in Hawai‘i—until now! This event presents an exciting opportunity to highlight honu and their cultural significance across the Pacific and Oceania.

With the Pacific Islands at the epicenter of global conservation challenges, this symposium arrives at a crucial time to foster meaningful discussions and inspire action for sea turtle research and conservation worldwide.



## Symposium Theme: "Kaiāulu" – Community

The theme of the 44th ISTS Symposium is “Kaiāulu,” a Hawaiian word meaning community, neighborhood, and village. This theme reflects the close-knit, collaborative nature of the sea turtle research and conservation community—honoring our shared commitment to understanding and protecting these incredible animals and their habitats through knowledge exchange, capacity building, and global cooperation.

## A Breathtaking Venue

The symposium will take place at the stunning Outrigger Kona Resort and Spa, perched atop the cliffs of Keauhou Bay on Hawai‘i Island’s west coast. This breathtaking venue provides an ideal setting for insightful and engaging symposium sessions, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange. It also offers the perfect backdrop for reconnecting with ‘turtler’ friends and colleagues from around the world.

Kailua-Kona, often simply called Kona, is a charming seaside town located approximately 20km from the airport that is known for its stunning sunsets, world-famous Kona coffee, historic sites, and incredible snorkeling spots. The relaxed island atmosphere, combined with the wealth of cultural and natural experiences, makes it an ideal destination for both professional engagement and personal adventure.

## Start Planning for the Meeting

Registration and abstract submission for the 44th ISTS Symposium is currently slated to open on October 1st, 2025, so start thinking about the impactful research and conservation efforts you want to share during the conference's oral and poster presentation sessions. Prior to those presentations we will hold two days of workshops, so if you're considering organizing one, keep an eye out for the request for workshop proposals scheduled to be released in late 2025. We will also host a full day of regional meetings, so start planning your meetings now. You can also prepare your videos to share during video-night, hone your stories for our Origin-stories session, collect unique items to donate to the symposium silent and live auctions to support travel grants, or set up an exhibitor/vendor kiosk to share information on your organization or business.

## Save the Dates and Begin Arranging Your Trip

The 44th ISTS Symposium in Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i, will occur between February 28th and March 6th, 2026, and promises to be an unforgettable experience, where science, culture, and conservation come together in one of the most breathtaking settings on Earth. Room reservations are now open and can be made [HERE](#) or via the link on the symposium website. The resort has limited capacity, and our ISTS room block is expected to fill quickly. We strongly encourage you to book early. Rooms outside the block may be more expensive, and alternative nearby accommodations are limited and similarly priced.

Mark your calendars, book your flights, and don't forget your swimsuit, reef-safe sunscreen, and slippahs! We can't

Alexander R. Gaos

President, International Sea Turtle Society

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**Thanks for reading and we'll see you at the beach!**