



Honu'ea Nest on Wild and Remote Beaches

Honu'ea Nest Here

Honu'ea, or Hawaiian hawksbill sea turtles, are critically endangered. Most honu'ea nest on the southern coast of the island of Hawai'i. Beach development, poaching, and predation from non-native mammals have reduced turtle populations to critically low levels. Their amber and brown shells are illegally sold worldwide as tortoiseshell jewelry. As of 2011, only 110 adult females have been documented (tagged) on Hawai'i Island.

Honu'ea only nest on a handful of beaches across the state. The remote nesting beaches of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park at 'Āpua Point, Keauhou, Halapē, and Kākiwai (Kaki'iwai) are protected. Even though you are unlikely to see one of these rare sea turtles, it is important to avoid disturbing turtles and their nesting activity.



Nesting Turtles are Very Sensitive

Nesting season extends from April to January, with peak activity from July to October. Females wait until night to crawl ashore and search for a suitable place to nest, usually beyond the tideline and around vegetation. She uses her strong back flippers to dig a flask-shaped egg cavity. Once completed, she lays around 200 eggs before covering the nest with sand. Exhausted, she returns to the sea leaving her golf ball-sized eggs to incubate for the next two months.



Loud noise, your movements on the beach, and light from campfires and your flashlight will frighten female honu'ea that are searching for a nest site or digging their nests. Several years ago, a nesting honu'ea got confused by campers' lights, wandered off course and fell into a lava crack. She was found dead and full of eggs. Your cooperation can help ensure this never happens again.

Hundreds Hatch Together

Born underground, a baby honu'ea is so small it can fit into the palm of your hand. The hatchlings work as a team to scrape sand off the roof of the nest cavity and push it down to the floor. In doing so, the hatchlings raise their nest towards the surface of the beach. Once they are near the surface, they wait for the coolness of night to emerge as a group and scramble to the water in the safety of numbers. Artificial lights such as flashlights, lanterns, or campfires disorient hatchlings on their way to the ocean. They can become trapped in thick vegetation or stuck in lava cracks. These stranded juveniles likely die of heat exposure, dehydration, or fall prey to predators.



Honu'ea Differ from Green Sea Turtles

Honu'ea or Hawaiian Hawksbill Sea Turtle



- **"Hawksbill Nest"**
Only seen coming to shore at night
- Nest on the main Hawaiian Islands
- Feed on sponges, primarily on the northeast coast of Hawai'i Island

Honu or Green Sea Turtle



- **"Greens Rest"**
Often seen sunbathing on the beach
- Nest on the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, over 700 miles (1127 km) away
- Eat seaweeds in shallow waters statewide

Stewards Take Action

Honu'ea protection is critical for the survival of this rare species. The Hawksbill Turtle Recovery Project acts to restore critical nesting habitat and works with the public to lessen human impacts on sea turtles. They monitor beaches along the Ka'u coastline for nesting honu'ea. Continuous nightly patrols are provided during the entire nesting season.



Volunteers and staff control predators, remove non-native vegetation, tag nesting turtles, protect nests, and help hatchlings reach the ocean. Over 800 nests and 85,000 hatchlings have been protected since 1989. Recovery project staff near your campsite can provide additional information and guidelines.



You Can Make a Difference

You can make a positive difference by observing the following guidelines during the nesting season:

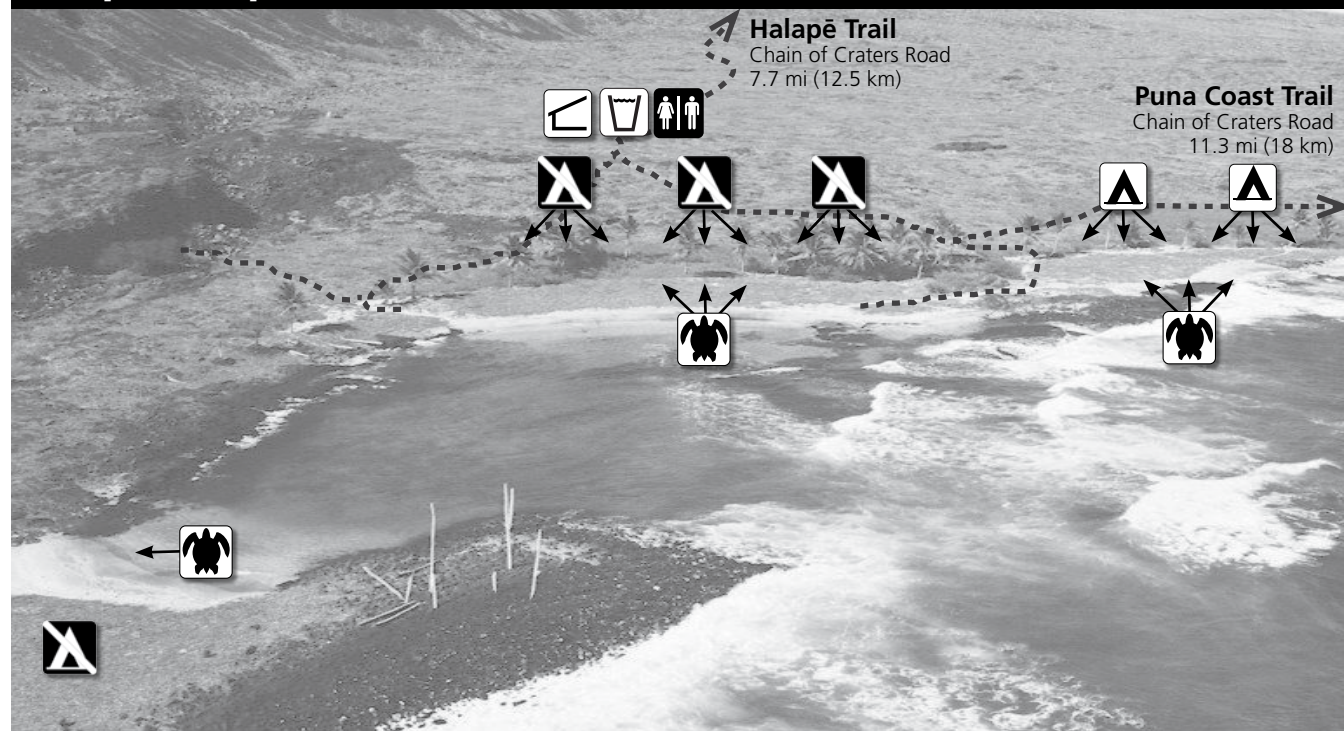
- **Do not camp or take livestock on sandy nesting beaches.** Your presence will disturb nesting turtles and hatchlings. The weight of a horse will destroy an egg chamber.
- **Campfires are not permitted in the park's backcountry.** Artificial lights, flash photography, and campfires disorient nesting turtles and attract hatchlings into dangerous situations. Use red filters on flashlights while on beaches at night. Direct all lights away from nest sites and the ocean.
- **Keep your campsite clean of food scraps.** Practice "Leave No Trace" ethics. Food scraps attract mongoose, and feral cats that prey on turtle eggs and hatchlings. Carry out your food scraps.
- **Federal and state laws protect all sea turtles and Hawaiian monk seals** from harassment, pursuit, killing, trapping, or collecting. Please stay at least 10 yards (10 m) away from turtles and 50 yards (45 m) from monk seals.

Stories of Old

According to Hawaiian legend, a mystical turtle, Kauila, makes her home in the Ka'u district at Punalu'u. Kauila was born to Honupo'okea and Honu'ea from a nest dug in a spring running through the black sand. Able to turn herself from a turtle into human form, Kauila plays and watches over children as they play along the shoreline.



Halapē: Campsites and Honu'ea Habitat



- Honu'ea Nesting Area
- Campsites
- Camping Prohibited
- Water—must treat before drinking
- Hiking Trail

Report Honu'ea Nestings and Monk Seal Sightings

Visitor observations have been invaluable in locating and protecting nests since the late 1980s. Please report your sightings as soon as possible to a Hawksbill Turtle Recovery Project volunteer in the backcountry, National Park staff at the visitor center, or by calling the Hawksbill Turtle Recovery Project Office at (808) 985-6090.

Location _____ **Date** _____ **Time** _____

Briefly describe turtle and monk seal observation (mark the map above or sketch your own and include it with this form, show location of nest mounds or digs, direction of tracks with entry and exit points from ocean, tag presence, haul out locations, GPS locations, etc.) _____

Weather and tide condition (rain, cloud cover, moon phase, rising or falling tide) _____

Your name _____ **Phone or email** _____

Please drop this form off at the Backcountry Permit Office or mail to: Hawksbill Turtle Recovery Project, P.O. Box 52, Hawai'i National Park, HI 96718. Mahalo for your help.