



## *Hawai'i Wildlife Fund*

www.wildhawaii.org

*"Dedicated to the preservation of Hawai'i's  
native wildlife through research, education  
and conservation"*

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Puna Aerial Reconnaissance Survey

January 14, 2019

Hilo, Hawai'i

During the nearly four-month course of lava flow in 2018 on Hawai'i's Kīlauea volcano and three months of active lava ocean entry from Fissure 8, Hawai'i Wildlife Fund (HWF) learned that reports were being made of large numbers of sea turtles that had been stranded or trapped as a result of the eruption. Surveys completed by state and federal agencies found no turtles in distress, but some community members continued to report and share otherwise on social media platforms. Due to this discrepancy, HWF saw the need for a third party to conduct additional surveys and report back to federal and state agencies, concerned Puna community members, and through social media platforms.

HWF's Puna Aerial Reconnaissance Survey Report, which details the areas surveyed and methods used, is available online here:

[http://wildhawaii.org/documents/HWFMarineResourceReconnaissanceSurvey\\_5Jan2019.pdf](http://wildhawaii.org/documents/HWFMarineResourceReconnaissanceSurvey_5Jan2019.pdf)

#### **After completing two aerial surveys, HWF identified the following:**

- 1) Turtles appear to be in higher numbers outside of the lava ocean entry areas, likely staying near the food sources that were not covered or "scrubbed" by new sand and wave interactions.
- 2) There is no evidence that large numbers of turtles were stranded or killed by lava flow, although there were obviously some tragedies. Turtle experts that were interviewed believe that most turtles would simply swim away from the lava impacted areas.
- 3) The recovery of ecosystems in the lava impacted areas will depend on healthy coral reefs nearby that can provide needed resources and fish/ invertebrate larvae for recolonization.
- 4) Hazards such as marine debris and ocean pollution likely have a greater negative impact on turtles and other marine resources worldwide than the recent lava ocean entry event.
- 5) Remember: **it's OK to help turtles**, but never shine lights around turtles as white light disorients them (use only red light). A green sea turtle basking on the shore is not in distress.

HWF would like to give a big MAHALO to all those that shared information and attempted to help turtles during the course of the recent lava flow on Hawai'i Island. This is how we ho'ō hui (come together) to take care of our native animals, wild places and learn how this natural event impacts our marine resources. We appreciate your kōkua (help)!

If you encounter an injured/ stranded turtle in Hawai'i, designated stranding responders may be able to assist, but reports must be timely (ideally within a few hours) and include photos, and involve a location that is accessible and safe for responders.

NOAA's statewide marine animal stranding and reporting hotline is:

**1-888-256-9840**. Additional information that is less time-sensitive can be sent via email (with photos) to [RespectWildlife@noaa.gov](mailto:RespectWildlife@noaa.gov).

HWF is a nonprofit conservation organization founded in 1996 to conserve Hawai'i's native wildlife. During its 22-year existence, in addition to coastal habitat restoration and wildlife protection, HWF and volunteers have removed over 280 tons of marine debris from the shores of Hawai'i Island, Maui and Midway. In 2018 alone, HWF removed over 53,000 lbs. of marine debris (nets, lines and plastic) during 60 cleanup events on Maui and Hawai'i Island. The majority of HWF's marine debris removal work is conducted by our treasured volunteers, with financial support from the federal government (grants from NOAA's Marine Debris Program), local businesses, in-kind and monetary donations from individuals and groups around the world.

If you would like more information on this project or learn how to get involved with HWF, please contact us at [kallie.hwf@gmail.com](mailto:kallie.hwf@gmail.com) or at 808-769-7629 or visit HWF's website at [www.wildhawaii.org](http://www.wildhawaii.org).

Donate to Hawaii Wildlife Fund: [www.wildhawaii.org/donate.html](http://www.wildhawaii.org/donate.html)

Related article: <https://www.hawaiitribune-herald.com/2018/07/23/hawaii-news/scientists-get-rare-chance-to-collect-data-on-impact-of-lava-on-marine-life-sea-water/>

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