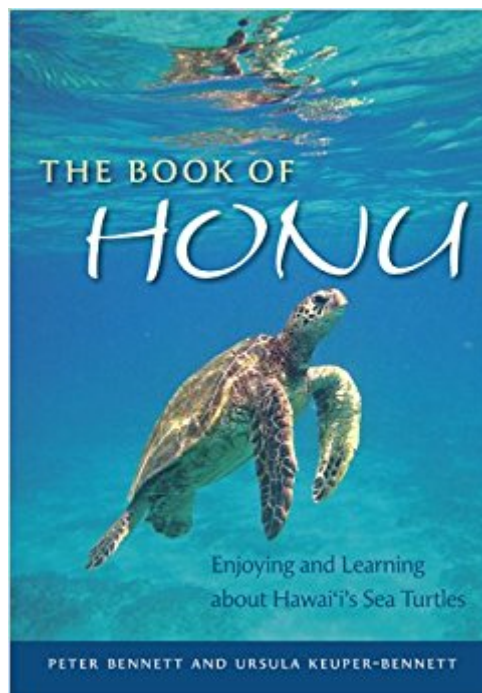




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# The Book Of Honu: Enjoying And Learning About Hawaii's Sea Turtles (Latitude 20 Books (Paperback))



## Synopsis

This is the first guide to finding and observing Hawaiian green turtles, or honu. It describes an exciting journey of discovery undertaken by two avid sports divers, Peter Bennett and Ursula Keuper-Bennett, who encountered their first honu twenty years ago while diving off Honokowai, Maui. The Bennetts soon realized that many honu (and green turtles worldwide) were afflicted with debilitating and potentially deadly tumors. They began to document the disease using photographs and videotape and in the process educated themselves about the daily lives of honu. To their surprise, they discovered they were the first to make prolonged observations of a marine turtle population in its natural habitat. Drawing on their extensive experience, the Bennetts explain how to find and watch honu from shore and while snorkeling, kayaking, and especially diving. They describe the behaviors they have documented over the years and what they might mean. Their rich collection of photographs will introduce readers to honu not only as a species, but also as individual animals whose histories they have closely followed and recorded. Thanks to a highly successful conservation and research program and protection granted by the U.S. Endangered Species Act, encounters between sea turtles and humans in Hawai'i have become common. Accessibly written and extensively illustrated, *The Book of Honu* will alert turtle enthusiasts and others on what to expect when they come across these gentle creatures and how to observe them respectfully.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A magnificent guide for the budding high school marine biologist or anyone else with an interest in sea turtles. . . . Extensively researched, and the Bennetts' passion for these creatures shines through every page.-- "Honolulu Advertiser"

A magnificent guide for the budding high school marine biologist or anyone else with an interest in sea turtles. . . . Extensively researched, and the Bennetts' passion for these creatures shines through every page. (Honolulu Advertiser)

Peter Bennett and Ursula Keuper-Bennett both fell in love with honu, the Pacific green sea turtle populating the Hawaiian Islands. This book, *The Book of Honu*, is their contribution to honu literature and art. The uniqueness of the authors' contributions is the detailed information on honu living in one place off the coast of Maui. They have identified over 750 unique honu, and watched them grow, interact with each other, disappear and reappear, and, sadly, disappear forever. Bennett and Keuper-Bennett aren't scientists, but their fascination with honu got them interacting with sea turtle managers and scientists. These scientists realized that Bennett and Keuper-Bennett possessed unique observations and insights about honu behavior, and the idea of collecting this information in one place resulted in the development of this book. As a book on honu, it has its strengths and weaknesses. You won't find everything you'd like to know about green sea turtles here. And Bennett and Keuper-Bennett aren't shy about speculating on the meaning of honu behaviors. But the photography is excellent, and there is some great insight into why (and how) honu do what they do (particularly Chapter 6, "The Things Honu Do"). Here are some comments and observations on issues discussed in the text: "Hawai'i's turtles are 100% Hawaiian, living their entire lives within the island chain and surrounding ocean waters" (p. 5). However, the "lost years" (mentioned on pages 59-60) note that we really don't know where post-hatchlings go and live for 4-6 years before returning to the main Hawaiian Islands. I'd call them 95% Hawaiian. "Any action that prompts a [basking] honu to retreat into the water, such as touching, could be considered illegal. More important, though, is to see it from the turtle's point of view: you've ruined a nice sunbath. How rude!" (p. 14). Bennett and Keuper-Bennett repeatedly point out proper etiquette while visiting honu in the water and on land. In discussing the head, the authors note "It turns out that a part of the head is an unusually thick skull. It's so thick that there isn't a lot of room for the brain, which in an adult is about the size of a shelled almond" (p. 30). Although I've not seen a honu brain (I've necropsied one loggerhead), and I know sea turtle brains are small, this seems too small. The brain is proportionally larger in hatchlings and juveniles than in subadults and adults according to sea

turtle anatomist Jeanette Wyneken, and any measurement really depends on how much of the brain you are looking at (forebrain, midbrain, hindbrain, spinal cord). An adult honu brain is probably a bit bigger than a shelled almond."Honu recruits are all promise, so if you encounter one, remember that they are impressionable and still learning. How you behave might have a significant effect on the little honu's future attitude toward humans" (p. 60). This is a theme Bennett and Keuper-Bennett repeat throughout their book: honu learn about humans via our interactions with them. However, I doubt (but cannot cite evidence) that hatchlings remember their interactions with people during that mad dash to the surf and the frenzied swimming that follows. Our behavior around baby honu probably affects our interactions with other sea creatures more than affecting honu behavior toward humans. However, that changes in a huge way when they finally reach their permanent foraging and resting sites. "Every single day in Hawai'i, humans are taming honu. By not harassing, hurting, or hunting them, residents and visitors alike teach the honu that they have nothing to fear from close human contact. As we said before honu learn from experience" (p. 139). Alas, this proved true when Honeygirl, a popular honu basking on Laniakea Beach on Oahu, was killed and butchered by persons as yet unknown in 2008. She learned that humans were no threat as thousands of visitors delighted in her company. In this case, she was wrong to trust us.

Chapter 6, again, is a real gift to the honu enthusiast! Finally, Bennett and Keuper-Bennett make note of the rumblings that there are some who want to begin killing and eating honu once again. "While the recovery of the honu population has triggered a call from some Hawaiians to allow turtle hunting again, none of the former hunters we know supports that position" (p. 116). "In the near future, Native Hawaiians could resume the right to catch a limited number of honu in accordance with their cultural customs and uses" (p. 125). It is important to note that, once honu are delisted as threatened (a designation that protects them under the Endangered Species Act; they are also protected by state law), there is no requirement that harvesting be limited to those of Hawaiian descent. There are no treaty rights dictating custom here, as with other native peoples that give them legal rights to harvest whales or other protected marine mammals. Currently, we see the controversy over western states trying to reinstate a hunting season on gray wolves, a recovered (or recovering) species. Similarly, we should expect great controversy over harvesting honu as well, since a generation of residents and visitors have come, like Bennett and Keuper-Bennett, to love "their" honu.

This is a great book for the honu enthusiast. This is also a book for people interested in any species of sea turtle, as Bennett and Keuper-Bennett provide great insights into how sea turtles can be studied, respected, and loved.

Ordered this book as a Christmas gift for my little niece who is 10 years old. Beautifully illustrated and so much interesting information, she was thrilled! Would recommend this for any child of that age or older.

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If you have visited or live in Hawaii, this book serves as a fascinating description of one of the islands' icons. It is surprisingly easy to read for such a technical biological text. For those who have yet to make it to the islands, the book is still an excellent way to learn about these awesome creatures.

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