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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Hawksbill Sea Turtle Discovery Inspires Ocean Education**

PRINCEVILLE, HI – "Discovering rare ocean animals is exciting. It also carries the weight of responsibility," said Robin Mazor, executive director of Reef Guardians Hawaii. Mazor recently came across a female honu'ea (hawksbill sea turtle)—one of the world's rarest and most endangered sea turtles. The remarkable sighting occurred during a reef monitoring session in Kauai's north shore waters.



Ms. Mermaid, a rare, endangered hawksbill turtle discovered in Kauai's north shore waters.

Reef Guardians Hawai'i, a nonprofit organization that protects Hawai'i's ocean and coral reefs, partners with Cheryl King from Hawaiian Hawksbill Conservation. Their shared efforts include public and youth education. Keiki (children) participating in Reef

Guardians' school break Reef Camps learn the scientific methods to photo-identify sea life, including honu'ea, to ensure that the data is useful for scientists.

Hawksbills are rare in Hawai'i compared to honu (green sea turtles), which outnumber hawksbills by about 100 to 1. "This unique turtle sighting reminds us of the crucial need for education and conservation efforts directed towards hawksbill turtles and their habitats," stated Mazor.

If you encounter a honu'ea, photograph both the left and right sides of its head and send the pictures to <https://www.hihawksbills.org>. These turtles, along with honu, are protected under state and federal laws, and it is illegal to harass, harm, pursue, capture, or alter their natural behavior. Keep a respectful and responsible distance when photographing. The collected data helps identify individual turtles and increase a deeper understanding of their behavior, migration patterns, and population dynamics, furthering conservation efforts.

These critically endangered turtles play a vital role in maintaining the health of coral reefs. Named for its narrow, pointed beak, the hawksbill sea turtle dines primarily on sponges. This helps prevent the overgrowth of these ocean invertebrates that could otherwise explode their populations and damage the reefs.

Hawaiian Hawksbill Conservation maintains a database of individually identified honu'ea. If you happen upon an undiscovered turtle, you get to name it. When a honu'ea was discovered during a summer Reef Camp session in 2020, the Kauai community voted to call it "Sawyer" after the camper who loaned his camera to record the sighting. Mazor's discovery is named Ms. Mermaid after her Reef Camp persona and nickname. It's a fitting tribute to Mazor's love for the ocean and all its creatures.



Professional marine educator teaches Reef Camp students about fish identification.

Reef Guardians Hawai'i invites keiki ages 8-13 to register for their upcoming fall break Reef Camp at Anini Beach, October 9-11. The three-day camp is designed for young explorers who are good swimmers and love snorkeling. A team of professional marine educators leads this fun and fascinating program, taught from ecological, Hawaiian kilo aina, and scientific perspectives, encouraging values of stewardship, curiosity, and a quest for learning. Participants explore and study the wonderful world of fish, limu/algae, and marine animals. Scholarships are available.

Register at <https://www.reefguardians.org/education>, Reef Guardians Hawai'i on Facebook, or reef.guardians on Instagram.