

SEA TURTLES AND DEBRIS: INGESTION AND ENTANGLEMENT

The impact of ocean debris on marine turtles was one of the many topics discussed at the recent "Workshop on the Fate and Impact of Marine Debris" (Honolulu, Hawaii, 26-29 November 1984). Short of severely curtailing the ocean dumping of all plastics, fishing gear and other material, there is probably not much that can be done to lessen the adverse effects of man-made debris on sea turtles. There are, however, a number of immediate activities that could be undertaken to improve our understanding of the nature of the impact. The following recommendations were made at the workshop:

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1. There should be greater efforts worldwide to record stranded turtles and conduct necropsies aimed at documenting debris ingestion and entanglement.
2. Studies should be conducted that involve the controlled feeding of plastics and other debris to turtles in captivity in order to gain definite information on intestinal obstruction, absorption of plasticizers, and feeding behavior.
3. Field studies aimed at elucidating the pelagic life of sea turtles along drift lines should be undertaken north of the Hawaiian islands in the Pacific.
4. A more thorough assessment should be made of sea turtle interaction with jettisoned by-catch from shrimp trawlers and other fisheries.

Based on an extensive literature review and personal communication with other researchers, I tabulated 64 cases of ingestion and 55 incidents of entanglement, many of which involved more than one turtle. In a continued effort to maintain a file on sea turtles ingesting or becoming entangled in marine debris, I would greatly appreciate receiving reports (old or new) of any such occurrences at the address below.

GEORGE H. BALAZS, Southwest Fisheries Center Honolulu Laboratory, National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA, P. O. Box 3830, Honolulu, Hawaii 96812 USA.

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