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Endangered turtles ingest man's trash

By Kelly S. Brown
Reporter

Twinkie wrappers and cigarette butts not only mess with our Texas beaches, but such man-made wastes are turning up in the stomachs of endangered sea turtles.

Over 42 percent of the sea turtles that wash up on the Texas beaches have man-made or processed material in their digestive tracts, said Dr. Andre Landry, a marine biologist at Texas A&M University at Galveston.

Plastic, found in 80 of the 269 stranded turtles, is the most common waste found in their stomachs. Other offscourings include tar, rubber, fishing lines, cellophane, wax, styrofoam, monofilament rope, aluminum cans, string and cigarette filters.

The evidence speaks for itself. Man negatively effects our marine environment when trash is left behind, Landry said.

"The debris is coming from littering tourists on the beaches, rivers carrying garbage into the sea and from what is being thrown from ships and boats," Landry said. Regulations have recently been passed prohibiting the dumping of trash at sea.

In 1986 Landry and graduate students joined with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network in hopes of finding what was killing the turtles so preventive action could be taken.

Every two weeks their explorations begin at Sabine Pass as they board either boats, trucks or a plane. They canvass 232 miles of beach and sea before the search ends on San Jose Island.

The stranded sea turtles found alive are brought to the NMFS Galveston Laboratory to recuperate, while

the dead reptiles are taken to the University for food habit analysis and a necropsy — examination to determine cause of death.

In the Gulf of Mexico, five general species of sea turtles exist and all are in danger of becoming extinct. Aside from the trash, their normal meals consist of crab, green grass, coral reef or jellyfish. The leather back, being the largest species, can weigh up to 2,000 pounds.

The correlation between trash and the debris found in stranded turtles' stomachs, Landry said, is a phenomenon that can be found on beaches everywhere. How often these accidental deaths will occur depends on the access of the beaches to the public.

"Texas has high access beaches, so this works with the fact that we have the most intensive Salvage Network, thus our beaches are well covered," Landry said.

Between January of 1986 and November of 1987, 269 turtle strandings have been documented. Debris was found in 113 of the turtles' stomachs.

"However, we don't know what percentage was actually killed by the debris," Landry said. "Such uncertainty is why we need research. We do know the debris effects have certainly not been advantageous."

The number one cause of death for turtles is drowning in shrimp nets, Landry said, while the second is the mutilations of turtles that occurs during explosions set off for building petroleum platforms.

"This alludes to the fact that most premature causes of death stem from man," said Kenny Saunders, a graduate student in the wildlife and fisheries department at Texas A&M University. "We should all be concerned about the future of turtles while remembering that they have a right to life," Saunders said. "They have an unknown potential value, a biological value as well as an aesthetic importance."

What's Up

Tuesday

TAMU COMPUTER USERS GROUP: Will meet the second Tuesday of each month in 308 Rudder Tower at 3 p.m.
TAMU SAILING CLUB: Will meet to discuss this summer's activities in 308 Rudder Tower at 7 p.m. All interested students and faculty are invited. For more information call Ronald Cooper at 260-1595.
TAMU SCUBA CLUB: Will have first meeting at the Flying Tomato at 7 p.m. For more information call Elsa Haubold at 696-6215.
CATHOLIC STUDENT ASSOCIATION: Will meet in the St. Mary's Student Center, 103 Nagle St., College Station, at 7:30 p.m., to discuss American Catholics in the 20th Century.

Items for What's Up should be submitted to The Battalion, 216 Reed in Donald, no later than three business days before the desired run date. Only publish the name and phone number of the contact if you ask us to do so. What's Up is a Battalion service that lists non-profit events and activities. Submissions are run on a first-come, first-served basis. There is no guarantee an entry will run. If you have questions, call the newsroom, 845-3315.

Man bites, swallows police officer's earlobe

LUBBOCK (AP) — Part of a policeman's ear was bitten off this weekend after a man detained in a routine traffic stop began fighting with officers as he was being placed in a squad car.

Willie Jackson, 27, was arraigned Sunday by weekend magistrate Pat Moseley, who set a \$10,000 bond on the charge of assault on a peace officer.

A \$300 bond was set on criminal mischief, driving while intoxicated, resisting arrest and two assault charges.

Jackson remained in jail Monday in lieu of the bonds, Sgt. Victor Lugo said.

Officer Brian McNeill was treated at Methodist Hospital for injuries suffered in a scuffle that occurred Saturday when he assisted other officers.

Jackson was stopped by another officer after he saw the man's car skidding sideways down a street,

according to police reports.

Jackson lives in an apartment a few blocks from where he was stopped. He told police he had a couple of beers at a birthday celebration.

The man failed a field sobriety test, the police report said. He was striking at officers as they cuffed him and placed him in the squad car, and then began kicking the interior of the car, the report said.

He was taken from the car, cord strapped together with handcuffs and returned to the vehicle.

As the officers returned to the car, he leaned forward and pulled off a portion of McNeill's left earlobe, the report said.

Police said the man apparently swallowed the severed piece of ear, despite officers' efforts to retrieve it. He also bit through an antenna wire in the back of a squad car, officers said.

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