

# BEWARE

## the Box Jellyfish

By Barbara Del Piano

One of the most irritating visitors to our popular southern and western beaches is the Box Jellyfish, or *Charbydea alata*, which regularly invades our pristine waters on an amazingly predictable schedule...exactly nine days after a full moon.

These almost transparent creatures which are difficult to see, wash in by the hundreds in the high tide, and are most numerous on the tenth day after the full moon. They begin to recede on the eleventh day.

The sting of these creatures is extremely painful and can be severe to people with certain types of allergies. Although the pain and discomfort of most stings is gone within approximately eight hours, for some, symptoms can include shortness of breath, nausea, abdominal cramps, back pain, swelling and mild shock, conditions which require prompt medical attention.

Life guards at our leeward beaches are well aware of the ETA of these virulent creatures and are prepared with a supply of vinegar, the best home remedy known. Remedies which are sometimes effective in relieving the pain of Portuguese Man O War stings, such as meat tenderizer or urine, have no effect on the Box Jellyfish and in some cases, can aggravate the sting. There are also pain-relieving sprays which offer some relief.

The first recorded noting of the Box Jellyfish in Hawaii was in 1906, but it wasn't until 1951 that a swarm appeared at Waikiki Beach, and occasionally thereafter they were seen in small numbers.

Then in the late '80's they began to make a regular appearance. However, it wasn't until the early '90's that life guards and frequent swimmers began to notice the unique regularity of their arrival. Eventually someone figured out the connection between the arrival of the jellyfish and the full moon. From then on, warnings have been regularly posted to warn swimmers, and in isolated areas such as Haunauma Bay, the beaches are closed.

Hawaii is the only known place in the world where this phenomena exists with such precise regularity. And nobody knows why for sure. Each month, UH scientists gather buckets full of specimens to study their habits and life cycles. One theory is that the jellyfish come in droves to spawn.

Outrigger Beach Attendant Sharna Engle says that fortunately, the beach in front of the Outrigger does not usually get the Jellyfish in the large numbers that can be found just up the beach at Waikiki. But when they do appear, Sharna says that they post signs and check on the supply of vinegar they keep on hand.

Our Club calender, a monthly feature of the *Outrigger* magazine, indicates the days when the unwelcome visitors will arrive. Warning notices are displayed in the Club's locker rooms as well. So if you're planning on going for a swim, it's best to find out if the water's safe before you take the plunge.