



PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA
Marine National Monument

NEWS RELEASE

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World's Oldest Known Wild Bird Hatches Another Chick

(Honolulu, HI) A Laysan albatross known as “Wisdom” – believed to be at least 62 years old – has hatched a chick on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) for the sixth consecutive year. Early morning on February 3, 2013, the still-wet chick was observed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Pete Leary, who said the chick appears healthy. Wisdom was first banded in 1956, when she was incubating an egg in the same area of the refuge. She was at least five years old at the time.

“Everyone continues to be inspired by Wisdom as a symbol of hope for her species,” said Doug Staller, the Fish and Wildlife Service Superintendent for the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (Monument), which includes Midway Atoll NWR.

Staff and volunteers stationed on Midway are responsible for monitoring the health of the beautiful seabirds that arrive every year by the hundreds of thousands to nest. Upon the seabirds’ arrival, field staff monitor them and gather information for one of the longest and oldest continuous survey data sets for tropical seabirds in the world.

Wisdom has worn out five bird bands since she was first banded by U.S. Geological Survey scientist Chandler Robbins in 1956. Robbins estimated Wisdom to be at least five years old at the time, since this is the earliest age at which these birds breed. Typically, they breed at eight or nine years of age after a very involved courtship lasting over several years, so Wisdom could be even older than 62.

“As Wisdom rewrites the record books, she provides new insights into the remarkable biology of seabirds,” said Bruce Peterjohn, chief of the North American Bird Banding Program at the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, MD.

“It is beyond words to describe the amazing accomplishments of this wonderful bird and how she demonstrates the value of bird banding to better understand the world around us. If she were human, she would be eligible for Medicare in a couple years yet she is still regularly raising young and annually circumnavigating the Pacific Ocean. Simply incredible.”

Peterjohn said Wisdom has likely raised at least 30 to 35 chicks during her breeding life, though the number may well be higher because experienced parents tend to be better parents than younger breeders. Albatross lay only one egg a year, but it takes much of a year to incubate and raise the chick. After consecutive years in which they have successfully raised and fledged a chick, the parents may take the occasional next year off from parenting. Wisdom is known to have nested in 2006 and then every year since 2008.

Sue Schulmeister, Manager of the Midway Atoll NWR, said, “Wisdom is one is one of those incredible seabirds that has provided the world valuable information about the longevity of these beautiful creatures and reinforces the importance of breeding adults in the population. This information helps us measure the health of our oceans that sustain albatross.”

Almost as amazing as being a parent at 62 is the number of miles Wisdom has likely logged – about 50,000 miles a year as an adult – which means that Wisdom has flown at least two million to three million miles since she was first banded. Or, to put it another way, that’s four to six trips from the Earth to the Moon and back again, with plenty of miles to spare.

Albatross are remarkable fliers, able to travel thousands of miles on wind currents without ever flapping their wings. Nineteen of 21 species of albatross are threatened with extinction, according to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Threats include longline fishing, in which birds are inadvertently hooked and drowned (though conservation groups have banded with fishermen and dramatically lowered the number of deaths from this cause); marine debris, which is ingested by adults and fed to chicks, often leading to starvation; invasive species such as rats and wild cats, which prey on eggs, chicks, and nesting adults; and on Midway, lead poisoning of chicks from lead-based paint used in previous decades.

Midway Atoll NWR hosts the world’s largest albatross colony, which is monitored by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff and volunteers. Elsewhere, Ka’ena Point Natural Area Reserve, managed by the State of Hawai’i Department of Land and Natural Resources, hosts the only nesting Laysan albatross colony on O’ahu and offers hikers the opportunity to observe these amazing seabirds from a distance as they tend to this season’s newly hatched chicks.

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Images of Wisdom available at

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwspacific/sets/72157624814220008/with/8444091571/>.

Papahānaumokuākea is cooperatively managed to ensure ecological integrity and achieve strong, long-term protection and perpetuation of Northwestern Hawaiian Island ecosystems, Native Hawaiian culture, and heritage resources for current and future generations. Three co-trustees - the Department of Commerce, Department of the Interior, and State of Hawai’i - joined by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, protect this special place. Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument was inscribed as the first mixed (natural and cultural) UNESCO World Heritage Site in the United States in July 2010. For more information, please visit www.papahanaumokuakea.gov.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

