



PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA  
Marine National Monument

**NEWS RELEASE**  
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***Wisdom hatches a healthy chick at 63 years old  
on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge***

(Midway Atoll, HI) A Laysan albatross known as “Wisdom” – at least 63 years old – is once again busy rearing a chick on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge within the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. The newly hatched chick was first sighted by visitor services manager, Ann Bell, being cared for by Wisdom the morning of February 4, 2014. Wisdom is a female albatross first banded as an adult in 1956.

“As the world’s oldest known bird in the wild, Wisdom is an iconic symbol of inspiration and hope for all seabird species.” said Dan Clark, refuge manager for Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. “She provides to the world valuable information about the longevity of these beautiful creatures. In the case of Wisdom, she has logged literally millions of miles over the Pacific Ocean in her lifetime to find enough fish eggs and squid to feed herself and multiple chicks, allowing us the opportunity to measure the health of our oceans which sustain albatross as well as ourselves.”

“Her ability to continue to hatch chicks during the last half century is beyond impressive despite the threats that albatross face at sea.” said refuge biologist Pete Leary. “It is a poignant and overwhelming reality that plastics discarded at sea float, from toothbrushes to millions of bottle caps, are sometimes used as a substrate for flying fish to attach their eggs, a food highly prized by foraging albatross and ultimately regurgitated into the chick’s mouth,” said Leary. “In addition, the chick’s sole survival is completely dependent on the health of Wisdom and her life-long mate and their dual ability to provide for food and protection.”

Albatrosses arrive on Midway Atoll Refuge by the hundreds of thousands to nest each year. Refuge staff and volunteers are responsible for monitoring the health of these extraordinary, beautiful ocean gliders. After spending five months at sea molting and feeding, albatross return to the same nesting site on Midway Atoll Refuge. Once they mate, an albatross pair will immediately begin to craft a sturdy nest. If they successfully incubate the egg and a chick hatches, each parent takes turns brooding their chick, until it can be left on its own, when they both will then forage for the chick’s meals over the next six months.

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 several consecutive years in which they have successfully raised and fledged a chick, the parents may take the occasional year off from parenting.





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## About Albatross

Albatross once nested throughout all the islands in the Hawaiian archipelago. Its Hawaiian name, mōlī, also refers to a tattoo needle that is made from the bone of an albatross.

Albatross are remarkable fliers who travel thousands of miles on wind currents without ever flapping their wings. They do this by angling their six foot wing span to adjust for wind currents and varying air speeds above the water. Almost as amazing as being a parent at 63 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.

Nineteen of 21 species of albatross are threatened with extinction, according to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. In the Northern hemisphere one highly visible threat is marine debris, which is ingested by adults and fed to their chicks, possibly leading to lower fledging weights and injuries to their digestive tract. Based on a recent analysis, five tons of plastic objects are brought to Midway Refuge each year by albatross in the course of feeding their young. Other threats include exposure to contaminants, such as lead-based paint currently being abated on Midway Refuge; longline fishing, where the birds are inadvertently hooked and drowned (though conservation groups have banded with fishermen and dramatically lowered the number of deaths from this cause); and invasive species on islands where rats, dogs and wild cats exist prey on eggs, chicks and nesting adults. One of the greatest threats to the long term survival of Laysan albatross and black-footed albatross, whose primary nesting sites are the low islands of Papahānaumokuākea Monument, is the loss of nesting habitat due to sea level rise.

For more information on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and the Battle of Midway National Memorial go to: <http://www.fws.gov/midway/>. Photos and Tumblr of Wisdom are available at <http://flic.kr/s/aHsjEbpt6h> and <http://usfwspacific.tumblr.com/post/75722624412/the-first-family-photo-wisdom-and-her-newest-chick>.

*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](http://www.fws.gov).*

*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](http://www.papahanaumokuakea.gov).*

