

PAPAĀNAUMOKUĀKEA MARINE NATIONAL MONUMENT

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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Update



May 8, 2009

Wildlife and Habitat Management

Hawaiian Islands NWR - Tern Island:

The staff at Tern Island have been improving habitat and mitigating some of the negative impacts of human presence, through one combined effort. Rocks being removed from both Shell Beach and the sooty tern nesting colony are being used to fill in the gap between the double sea wall. This gap traps dancing albatross, that in the heat of the dancing moment, fall in and cannot free themselves. In addition, rock removal also improves nesting habitat for turtles on Shell Beach and all ground nesting seabirds that might want to use the same areas as the sooty terns. At present, about one third of the work is complete.

All mark and recapture work has been completed for the five seabird species being studied, which include: wedge-tailed shearwaters, masked boobies, red-tailed tropicbirds, Bonin petrels and Christmas shearwaters.

Finally, the staff has implemented a weekly “invasives day,” where all island residents pull together (pun intended) to eradicate invasive plants such as cheese-weed and this-tle. Almost the entire island has been swept, with approximately 90% having been treated.



Volunteer, Jim Waddington, helps to remove cheese-weed from Tern Island

Hawaiian Islands NWR - Laysan Island:

Laysan Island is being considered as a potential relocation site for the endangered Nihoa millerbird, which is endemic to Nihoa Island. Laysan once hosted its own race of millerbird, but due to extreme habitat degradation by introduced rabbits, became extinct sometime between 1916 and 1923.

As of April 23, an estimated thirteen critically endangered Hawaiian monk seal pups have been sighted on Laysan Island.

Midway Atoll NWR:

Marc Romano, USFWS Wildlife Biologist, placed fifteen new “geo-locators” on Laysan albatross, as well as fifteen new geo-locators on black-footed albatrosses. These devices allow the birds’ daily movements to be tracked over a two-year period. The goal is to combine this data with information on fishing distribution and intensity to determine where albatross might be at risk while at sea.

Fuzzy Laysan ducklings are popping up all over the place with all three seeps on Eastern Island hosting new broods, as well as multiple broods scattered about Sand Island. Jimmy Breeden, of the U.S. Geological Survey, has already witnessed initial broods left alone at the seeps while it is assumed that the hens have started incubating second clutches.

Two Hawaiian monk seal pups from this year’s breeding season have been spotted on the refuge by National Marine Fisheries biologists who are on station to monitor the monk seal population. One “weaner” (a weaned pup) was spotted on Spit Island, while one nursing pup was located on Eastern Island.

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Maintenance

Hawaiian Islands NWR - Tern Island:

There's always a new maintenance challenge on Tern, this time it was the lighting. Once again, Refuge Manager Dave Zabriskie was able to put his handy-man talents to work and solve the problem.

Midway Atoll NWR:

Much has been and will be going on at Midway! Two mechanics from NC Power, assisted by Maintenance Mechanic John Miller, hoisted and installed a 14,000 lb. part to repair the back-up generator, which incidentally is strategically placed well above any potential water surge.

Five Chugach construction contractors were on site to evaluate, repair and install multiple facilities. These included inspecting cracked concrete that was poured in 2007 as part of the runway lighting upgrades, treating rust that had formed on the new 2007 fuel farm tanks, installing a new gasoline tank and fuels lab building at the fuel farm. The crew will be on site for approximately one month to work on these labor-intensive projects.

Five engineers from two different firms inspected the historic seaplane hangar to assess its structural integrity as the refuge moves forward with plans to

repair the building's collapsing roof. Results of the assessment will be forwarded in mid May.

The complete renovation of one of the historic officers' homes came to fruition, with the delighted new residents moving in on April 12. The remaining eight officers' quarters will receive similar face lifts, including significant improvements in energy efficiency and sprinkler systems, as part of the Recovery

Act stimulus package.



*Remodeled
Historic Officers'
Quarters—
before and after*

Administration

An extensive mass-casualty Emergency Response Training that was planned to occur in May through partnership efforts of FWS, USCG, NOAA, NPS and University of California—Davis to simulate an airplane crash on Midway Atoll was cancelled/postponed. An essential partner in the effort, the Coast Guard, was unable to fully participate as they readied for their principle mission of coastal protection and maritime safety at locations beyond the horizon. In its place, staff from USCG, NOAA and UC Davis agreed to instruct a First Responder Course for the fire brigade, as well as other island residents, to be administered in May.

On April 3rd, the Hawaii House of Representatives presented a resolution to the Monument Management Board honoring the 100th anniversary of the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge. The resolution recognizes the refuge as Hawaii's oldest national wildlife refuge protecting and preserving the fragile ocean ecosystems of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Through this resolution, the House of Representatives "proclaims its strong support for the continuation of the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, congratulates them on the momentous occasion of its 100th anniversary, and thanks the many conservation workers who provide stewardship for this precious

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Administration (continued)



Off-loading supplies from plane on Tern Island

Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge Biologist, John Klavitter returned to Midway after almost two and a half months of other duties. In late February, John attended and presented at the Pacific Seabird Group Meeting, in Hakodate, Japan. He then served at a sister refuge in need, as the Acting Refuge Manager at Guam National Wildlife Refuge.

After a painfully long wait, the FWS Monument Administrative Officer position has finally been filled. We welcome Maylanie Hipolito, who joined us on April 12.

Ty Benally, Refuge Operations Specialist, completed basic aviation training, and is now the official flight operations coordinator for Tern Island.

Visitor Services

A “call for requested dates” for visitor groups to Midway Atoll NWR for 2010 ended on April 15, with a tentative schedule to be announced in May. Five ecotourism companies have requested dates, with one company being based as far away as Japan. The visitation of a group lead by the Oceanic Wilderness Society will be an outstanding opportunity to enlighten our neighbors across the Pacific Ocean in regard to issues concerning marine debris in the North Pacific gyre.

Plans are being made with the Sierra Club to host a two-week “environmental service” trip to Midway in 2011. The primary focus of the visit will be to assist the refuge with habitat restoration, including *Verbesina* removal, native plant cloning, and out-planting of native plants.

Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge hosted two visitor groups during the month of April, one of which organizes photography trips around the globe. The following are a few of the written comments received about their experiences:

- “Just hadn’t anticipated the bird concentration. Exceptional opportunity to photograph Laysan albatross and white terns.”
- “I expected Goony bird chicks by the thousands – but this was by the millions! Thoroughly enjoyed the freedom to explore by bike on my own or join the golf cart group if I felt like it. The history of Midway was surprisingly impactful and the beaches and ocean something beautiful. We’ve got to do something about all that plastic!”
- “...intense opportunities to photograph and observe were extraordinary. The pristine nature of the area was also a great plus. There was a ton of more than expected excellence...and the rare opportunity to see and photograph an endemic location.”
- “Midway was beyond our wildest imagination!”

*“I am myself and what is around me,
and if I do not save it,
it shall not save me.”*

José Ortega y Gasset

