



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

PAPAĀNAUMOKUĀKEA Marine National Monument

February 2010 Update

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Wildlife and Habitat Management

Hawaiian Islands NWR - Tern Island:

Monitoring of the albatross reproductive plots on Tern Island continued throughout the month, with volunteers and staff completing weekly “sweeps,” checking the standardized survey areas.

Nests were also monitored for mean incubation time for both red-tailed tropicbirds and brown noddies. As soon as nesting begins, biologists check daily for the first egg laid, and then continue to monitor the same nests until the last egg has hatched. The data is gauged with prior years to alert managers of nesting changes through time.

“Mark and recapture” studies continued for red-tailed tropicbirds and Bonin petrels.



Bonin petrel portrait.

Each season, every bird of the targeted species within specified plots is captured and either has its leg band read and recorded, or is banded if it is not already banded. This ongoing study allows staff to track changes in population size and to perhaps understand the underlying causes of those changes.

Hawaiian Islands NWR - Laysan Island:

Laysan’s first Hawaiian monk seal pup of the year was sighted on the last day of the month. FWS staff also assisted National Marine Fisheries Service on-island personnel with monk seal de-worming. The de-worming project is undertaken to advance the recovery of the Hawaiian monk seal by improving the seals’ overall health and nutrition.

A quarterly ant survey, initiated in 2006, confirmed six species of alien invasive ants on Laysan Island. The island is known to have these infestations for many years, and impacts to both native plants and seabirds continue to be monitored.

Propagation and outplanting of native plants, such as *Pritchardia remota* (an endangered palm tree) and *Ipomea indica* (in the morning glory family) continued throughout the month in accordance with the Laysan Restoration Plan and Monument Management Plan.

Midway Atoll NWR:

Two albino Laysan albatross chicks were discovered within 10 feet of each other on Sand Island. Albino chicks have been seen in the same area 3 of the last 4 years. Two of the chicks successfully fledged; however none are known to have returned as adults. Survival rates of wild albino animals is often lower, as they are easily preyed upon and handicapped with high sensitivity to sunlight and glare.



This “fair feathered” youngster probably benefits from the shade of its parent even more so than does its typically darker colored cousins.

Wildlife and Habitat Management (cont'd.)

Refuge staff and volunteers continued management of nonnative plants on approximately 200 acres of Midway Atoll Refuge, with most efforts concentrated on *Verbesina encelioides* (golden crown-beard), an aggressive plant that severely hampers nesting success of albatross. To complete the cycle of habitat restoration, staff also continued to propagate and outplant native morning glories (*Ipomea indica* and *I. pes-caprae*) and bunch grass (*Eragrostis variabilis*), averaging approximately 300 pots each week.

Weekly wetland checks and Laysan duck surveys were completed throughout the month on both Sand and Eastern Islands. In addition, weekly surveys of three black-footed and two Laysan albatross survey plots continued to gauge the reproductive success, a useful indicator of ocean health.

While on routine beach patrol on Sand Island, Refuge Law Enforcement Officer Jason Beatty discovered an adult Hawaiian monk seal entangled in a mass of derelict fishing net and what appeared to be heavy duty strapping tape. With the assistance of Refuge Manager Matt Brown, a specially designed “disentanglement” tool was used to safely cut the netting and strapping tape away from the seal, with a minimal amount of

contact or disturbance. The seal rolled over and resumed its nap after the materials were cut away and removed.



Hawaiian monk seal resting after being disentangled from marine debris.

Maintenance

Hawaiian Islands NWR - Tern Island:

Ongoing challenges with the electrical system and generators necessitated manual starts, parts replacement, and taking some of the system off-line. However, by the end of the month Refuge staff had the system working well again.

Midway Atoll NWR:

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) projects continued to make excellent progress throughout the month. Some of the work completed on eight of the historic officers' homes included: lead paint and asbestos removal from six of the homes; repairs to concrete foundations; and, training for Chugach Industries staff to properly install hybrid solar/electric water heaters.



Historic officer's home fully gutted of asbestos and lead paint, and ready for energy-efficient renovations.

Administration

On Saturday, Feb. 27, FWS initiated its Emergency Response Plan to prepare for the tsunami generated from an earthquake centered in Chile. Station-specific statistics and activities included:

- Midway- 76 FWS staff and contractors on island. Response was to shelter in place at third- floor Charlie Barracks. All-hands meeting was held to inform and mobilize all residents and visiting contractors. No visitors were on island. Emergency equipment and all people were in place one hour before predicted ETA of waves.



Staging of emergency and heavy equipment at Midway Atoll NWR before being moved to “high ground” in preparation for the February tsunami.

- Laysan - 4 FWS staff and volunteers and 3 NMFS staff sheltered in place. All-hands secured 5 days of provisions, communications, and emergency gear at hurricane shelter (which sits roughly 22 feet above sea level) 1 hour before predicted ETA of waves.
- Tern - 6 FWS staff and volunteers. FWS flight contractor Pacific Air Charters was dispatched to evacuate team to Honolulu. Team was flown back and redeployed to Tern within a week.

Thankfully, there were no measurable impacts once the “waves” passed, with the tsunami warning canceled at 2:00pm HST. Overall, the event resulted in being an outstanding “dry run” exercise for the next time when there might be much less time to prepare.

Managers of the contracted supply vessel *M/V Kahana* commissioned an engineering survey that concluded the ship’s stability would allow for “double stacking” containers on the ship (with weight limitations). This capability will allow for roughly 7 additional containers full of supplies to be shipped to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands on the *M/V Kahana*; thereby increasing square foot efficiency of each charter by nearly 50%. The March resupply mission will also provide transport support for the FWS and NMFS endangered species programs for scientists working on the recovery of the Nihoa millerbird and Hawaiian monk seal, respectively.

Papahānaumokuākea Permit Coordinators received 23 new permit applications for the February submission period. All activities, including research, education, commercial operation, administration, and recreation require a permit. FWS agency experts are reviewing the applications to ensure that proposed activities are appropriate for management of Papahānaumokuākea.

Hawaiian Islands NWR- Tern Island:

A flight was contracted late in the month to transfer staff, food, and other supplies, as well as an electronics and IT technician to Tern Island. The technician was on island for the day to replace the computer modem and restore critical internet capabilities to the island. Internet communications have been inoperable for months; the failure suspected as caused from the taking the system down during evacuation for Hurricane Neki.

Midway Atoll NWR:

FWS Regional Safety Officer Alan Williams conducted a safety audit of the facilities on Midway Atoll. The last FWS safety audit took place approximately 4 years ago. Mr. Williams was able to inspect FWS residences and office spaces, the “hotel” at Charlie Barracks, buildings used jointly by FWS and Chugach Industries Inc., and American Reinvestment and Recovery Act building projects. A report will be submitted through the FWS Regional Office.

Visitor Services and Emergency Operations

Law Enforcement Officer Jason Beatty and seasonal Interpretive Park Ranger Mark Stewart both arrived on Midway at the end of February. Midway's visitor program moves into full swing on March 1st with the arrival of a Photo-Safari group. Visitors groups of 15-people are scheduled to be on Midway almost nonstop from March 1st until the end of June.



Sailing vessel, Freydis, in Midway's inner harbor.

In mid February, Midway was contacted via marine band radio by the crew of the German-flagged sailing vessel *Freydis*.

The *Freydis*

communicated that they were 9 miles from Midway and were experiencing generator problems but would be able to make it into the harbor without assistance. The Midway team worked to repair the *Freydis*' generator so that they could depart as quickly as possible. However, the day the vessel was scheduled to depart an albatross hit and damaged navigational equipment at the top of the mast. After spending a week on Midway receiving emergency repairs, the *Freydis* departed the Refuge and Papahānaumokuākea MNM on February 22, bound for Chichi-Jima, Japan.

After daylight hours on February 2, a U.S. Army C-12 aircraft landed at Midway with two crew members en route from Wake Island to South Carolina. This aircraft

was normally stationed in Korea and ferried cargo to the Philippines in support of the War on Terror, as part of Operation Enduring Freedom. The C-12 aircraft was en route to South Carolina because it needed a complete overhaul. Midway crews refueled the plane, and it departed the following morning for Cold Bay, Alaska. The pilots informed FWS staff that, because of its limited range, it would be virtually impossible for this aircraft to obtain the necessary overhaul in South Carolina without the ability to rest and refuel at Midway Atoll.

On Sunday, February 21, Midway Atoll provided support for a U.S. Coast Guard Search and Rescue mission. On Saturday, February 20, a 24-year old crew member is believed to have fallen off of a Japanese cruise ship about 300 miles southwest of Midway. Midway provided logistical support (airport/fuel services, overnight accommodations, etc.) to the C-130 crew involved in the search mission.



Send us your comments, or for more information contact:

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