

PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA MARINE NATIONAL MONUMENT

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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Update



March 13, 2009

Wildlife and Habitat Management

This is our first installment of— what we plan to be - a monthly update from the FWS Papahānaumokuākea team. With these updates, our management and staff hope to share information on the conservation work that occurs on our remote field stations at Midway, Laysan and Tern Islands; as well as the necessary Honolulu effort that supports them. These updates are meant to be informative yet brief, so please let us know what you think.

- Mahalo! -

Hawaiian Islands NWR - Tern Island:

Assistant Tern Island Manager, Pete Leary, and Tern volunteers, Jim and Cindy Waddington and Mary Gibson, continued long-term monitoring of seabird species, including mark and recapture projects for the masked booby, red-tailed tropic bird, and Bonin petrels. The team also continued the long-term surveys and monitoring for reproductive success of the red-footed booby, red-tailed tropic birds, black-footed albatross, Laysan albatross, Tristrom's storm petrel, and black noddy.

As of February, the Tern Island crew saw the seasonal return of thousands of sooty terns, wedge-tailed shearwaters, and Christmas shearwaters.

Volunteers were reminded how harsh life in the wild can be, as one witnessed a black-footed albatross with its beak around the neck, strangling, a young greater frigatebird. Frigatebirds are notorious for preying upon chicks- including albatross chicks. This frigate wasn't so successful.

Hawaiian Islands NWR - Laysan Island:

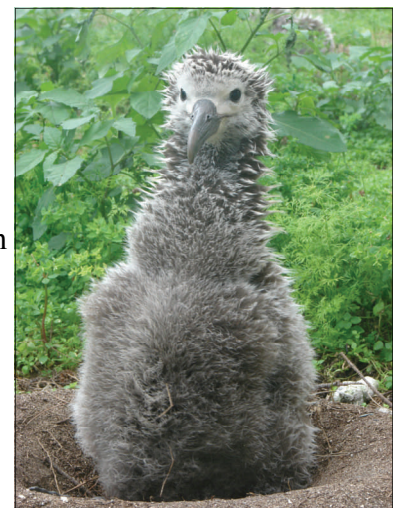
Biological Technicians, Matt Hennen and Jennifer Chastant, along with volunteers McKinzie Mudge and Lisa Dlugolecki continue months four and five of their six-month deployment. They have been restoring habitat by removing and treating invasive

plants and outplanting native species. The team continues albatross nesting population estimates that began in 1991, counts of black-footed albatross, and nestling survivorship. Laysan Island is an important component for understanding the status of Laysan and black-footed albatross due to its natural habitat conditions with minimal disturbance. Because of this relatively natural state, Laysan has fewer variables to consider when looking at potential impacts, and provides an opportunity to identify conditions at sea that may affect the population.

Midway Atoll NWR:

Pacific Remote Refuges Wildlife Biologist, Dr. Beth Flint, Midway staff, and about a dozen volunteers conducted the annual albatross surveys at Midway. The number of albatross nesting pairs for 2008 is down approximately 20% from 2007. By the end of February, black-footed and Laysan albatross chicks were hatching in force.

Biological Technician, Greg Schubert, continues to lead the habitat restoration crew. In January and February the team outplanted over 2,000 native plants on Sand Island at Midway. In addition, this effort has removed the invasive *Verbesina* and is restoring acres of habitat with native vegetation.



A New Recruit: Laysan Albatross Chick

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Maintenance

Hawaiian Islands NWR - Tern Island:

A particularly strong winter storm in January damaged the Tern Island warehouse. Two of the paneled walls buckled under the strong winds. Assistant Refuge Manager Leary was able to stabilize the walls temporarily with tie-straps. Fortunately, repair of the warehouse walls and replacement of the roof is scheduled to occur with a FY08 refuge deferred maintenance project.

Tern Island is preparing and planning for updating its drinking water system to a water catchment/filtration system to replace the current, less efficient and more costly reverse osmosis process. Contractors are scheduled to install the new system later in March.

Midway Atoll NWR:

Restoration work on one of the historic 1941 senior officers' quarters is almost complete. The interior of the structure was entirely resurfaced, from walls to

flooring. The remaining eight officers' quarters, which saw and survived the Battle of Midway, are scheduled to receive varying degrees of renovation this year and will be used for housing/lodging and possible office space.

NOAA and FWS contractors visited Midway to assess some of the historic structures for the development of conceptual plans to potentially renovate and re-use the buildings for such things as housing, a wet lab, and boathouse.



Historic Senior Officer's Quarters

Administration

Tern, Laysan, and Midway support staffs embarked on massive planning and procurement efforts to prepare for 3/19 departure of the supply vessel, M/V Kahana. The ship's 2-week deployment will deliver the water-system contractors and supplies to Tern Island, as well as supplies and volunteers for the up-coming summer science season. The ship will also deliver the change-out the crew and supplies to Laysan for their 6-month deployment. And lastly, the ship will deliver a replacement generator, supplies, and gasoline to Midway to support station operations.

Four FWS staff members and volunteers successfully completed required training in the three-day Basic and two-day Open Water Modules of the Department of the Interior Motorboat Operator Certifi-

cation Course, held on Ford Island, Honolulu and at the Hawaiian Institute of Marine Biology, on Coconut Island. In addition, three Midway personnel participated in a half-day Advanced Boat Operator session to prepare them for the Disaster/Rescue Training scheduled for May on Midway Atoll.

Midway's safety program and protocols were significantly updated by Doug McCauley, Hawaii and Pacific Islands Refuge Complex Intermittent Manager. Doug served as Midway's Acting Deputy Refuge Manager during February while the position is vacant. Topics such as new employee orientation, home safety, equipment operation certification, and the outdated tsunami warning system were addressed.

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Administration (continued)

Amanda Boyd and Matt Stelmach were hired as the summer-season temporary biological technicians for Laysan. They will be deployed to Laysan with volunteers Joe Mainarke and Brett Soucie from March through September.

A new team of Tern Island volunteers were also selected. Adam Fox, Therese Hayes, Whitney Taylor, and Sarah Davis will travel on the M/V Kahana to Tern in March and return in September.

Vernon “Ray” Born was selected as the new FWS Permit Coordinator for the Monument. Ray is moving from the southeast USA and will start 3/15/09.

All sites have been awaiting word on the Recovery Act Projects. Specifically, there is much hope for funds to improve energy efficiency.



Napping Laysan Albatross Chick

Visitor Services

On February 3, 2009, the Hawaiian Islands NWR celebrated its 100-year anniversary. An estimated 125 people attended the evening celebration on Kauaʻi, including members of the community, family members of past residents of the NWHI, Native Hawaiians, fishermen, representatives from the Polynesian Voyaging Society, past FWS, State, and NOAA biologists and managers, and many others. Weather precluded having the event at Kīlauea Point NWR as hoped, but the back-up venue served all well. The celebration; organized and sponsored by Monument management partners as well as the Kīlauea Point Natural History Association and Friends of Midway Atoll; celebrated the generations of caring – past, present and future - for this special place.

Announcements for the summer and autumn Tern, Laysan, and Midway volunteer vacancies within the Monument are posted on www.volunteer.gov website. Refuge Operations Specialist, Ty Benally, has been sorting through and forwarding applications to eagerly awaiting our hiring officials at the appropriate stations.

The country’s economic downturn significantly impacted the Visitor Services Program at Midway Atoll this season, resulting in the Oceanic Society cancelling 10 of 14 scheduled trips for FY09. As a consequence, the decision was made to postpone hiring a temporary interpretive park ranger at Midway until FY10.

Midway hosted 14 Duke University students involved in marine conservation and management. In addition to spending a week learning about and exploring one of the most remote island ecosystems on the planet, the students donated a day of their time to assist the Midway community by sorting and preparing recyclable materials for removal.

A press release was distributed announcing the opportunity for amateur radio operators to broadcast from Midway Atoll for the first time since 2002, in accordance with the Visitor Services Plan. An overwhelming response was received, with all accommodations being booked within 24 hours of the press release.

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“The conservation of natural resources is the fundamental problem. Unless we solve that problem it will avail us little to solve all others.”

Theodore Roosevelt

