

PAPAĀNAUMOKUĀKEA MARINE NATIONAL MONUMENT

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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Update



May 2009

Wildlife and Habitat Management

Hawaiian Islands NWR - Tern Island:

The field season is in full swing at Tern Island with the arrival of nine additional researchers. Some of the work being done includes:

Continuing years of interagency cooperation, four National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Hawaiian monk seal researchers are on site this year to monitor the French Frigate Shoals population and pup survivorship. Twelve pups were reported at FFS, with one having been badly bitten by a shark in May.

By the end of May, three Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology (HIMB) researchers were making great progress on their project to capture and tag Galapagos and tiger sharks (33% of goal and 20% of goal, respectively). The project is designed to track and monitor individual shark behavior and effects on endangered Hawaiian monk seal pups.

The "turtle camp", staffed by two researchers, is fully operational on East Island. Assistant Refuge Manager Pete Leary spent a night on East Island with the 2-person NOAA and FWS turtle team and was duly impressed with their efficient remote-camp operation and hard work. One hundred eighty nesting females have been documented thus far.

Banding of albatross chicks continued, with the goal of all chicks on Tern being banded. By the end of May, approximately 25% of chicks had bands... only about 2,250 more to go!

In general, Tern Island Refuge Manager Dave Zabriskie reported that weather had been alternating from "good for boating and bad for biology" to "bad for boating and good for biology." It is always the ideal to have a happy medium, but such are the challenges and rewards of field work!

Finally, Tern Island staff submitted five "cetacean observation forms" to NOAA for the first 5 months of 2009. The notable sightings were humpback whales breaching just north of Tern Island.



Humpback Whale Breaching Near Tern Island

Hawaiian Islands NWR - Laysan Island:

The unusually cool, wet spring has provided excellent growing conditions for invasive plants on Laysan Island, with staff being overwhelmed throughout the month removing invasive species. In particular, *Pluchea* had been found in a variety of growth forms, and late in May, plants were seen with one inch buds. In addition to the basic challenge of eradicating this hardy plant, Cindy Rehkemper, Biological Science Technician, is investigating different strategies for removal of *Pluchea* to limit the impact such disturbance might have on native birds. An initially unknown plant was identified as "false kamani," which unfortunately is one more nonnative to add to the list. However, on

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Wildlife and Habitat Management (continued)

the positive side of enhanced plant growth, the native *Capparis* was found to be flowering and fruiting.

In regard to wildlife, the birds are also benefitting from a pleasantly cool spring. The first brown noddy egg was seen mid-May, while the first gray-backed tern and red-footed booby chicks were seen by the end of the month. Finally, the Laysan duckling count was up to 223 little fuzzballs.

The three-member NMFS monk seal crew has reported 26 seal pups on Laysan to date.



Laysan Island - "Camp Ducks"

Midway Atoll NWR:

U.S. Geological Survey biologist estimated well over 300 Laysan ducklings at Midway Atoll. In a strange twist, they also found an unusual specimen - a blind Laysan duck. For all accounts, the adult male appeared to be otherwise healthy and doing well. That just goes to prove how much "duck food" there must be available on Midway!

Under the guidance of Greg Schubert, Biological Technician, refuge staff and volunteers continue the quest toward habitat restoration. Currently, about 15% of refuge lands are being controlled for non-native *Verbesina*. In addition, an average of 400 pots of native bunch grass are being out-planted each week.

Monitoring of juvenile recruitment and adult survivorship of black-lipped pearl oysters is continuing for its third field season through a partnership with University of California - Santa Cruz. Once abundant in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, the oysters were severely depleted as a result of the pearl industry.

Six Hawaiian monk seal pups have been located at Midway. NMFS staff continue to perform regular monitoring.

Maintenance

Hawaiian Islands NWR - Tern Island:

Much routine maintenance was completed, including fixing clogged plumbing (once again); cleaning and repairing a faulty hoist; and installation of two computers to replace two that are in need of repair. In addition, significant attention was given to the boat dock. A shut-off valve was installed and the water spigots were repaired to stop a leak, as well as grinding down screws that had been pulling out and putting new bunkers in place.

Midway Atoll NWR:

An engineering firm out of Honolulu was contracted to assess the structural integrity and provide a cost estimates for repairs for the historic 1941 seaplane hangar. The firm's resultant report stated that "due to relatively harsh marine island environment and lack of proper maintenance it has deteriorated and aged at an accelerated rate." An options paper is under development for review by the FWS Regional Office.

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Administration

Tern Island Refuge Manager Dave Zabriskie accepted a position as the new supervisory wildlife refuge specialist at Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge. Although he will be sorely missed, Dave is wished the best of luck in his new endeavor!

NOAA's *R/V Oscar Elton Sette* provided multiple support services to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands during its spring research cruise. In addition to dropping off and picking up a number of USFWS staff at Laysan and Tern Islands, and delivery of much needed supplies and equipment to these remote outposts, the vessel also transported 36,000 pounds of trashed lead acid vehicle batteries off of Midway Atoll NWR.

In cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), on May 25th Midway Atoll NWR staff assisted with the medical evacuation of a fisherman from a 104 ft. Japanese fishing boat. Refuge and Coast Guard personnel successfully retrieved the sick fisherman from the vessel at a predesignated site approximately 1 mile offshore. The patient was stabilized and transported to Honolulu via the USCG C-130 aircraft. Later that same morning, at the island's Memorial Day Observance, the pleasant irony was noted that 67 years ago we had been at war with the Japanese, while on this day in 2009, we were all working together to save the life of a Japanese fisherman.



Midway Atoll NWR Staff Arrive With "Medevac" Patient

Fifteen of Midway Atoll NWR's fire brigade, along with its Visitor Services Manager, participated in a 40-hour training course and became certified as "Emergency Responders." Island visitors, researchers and residents are safer as a result this training, which was provided through a partnership of U.S. Coast Guard, FWS, and University of California - Santa Barbara.



Midway Atoll NWR's "Emergency Responders"

Final amendments were made to a FWS multi-option year contract with the *M/V Kahana* to service the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The vessel will sail to the islands quarterly, providing critical equipment, supplies, fuel and staffing change-outs to these remote islands.

Ken Foote, Information and Education Specialist - Division of External Affairs, arrived on Midway Atoll NWR to serve a 5-week detail as the Acting Deputy Refuge Manager.

Three Midway Atoll NWR staff received SCUBA certification training through donated services. SCUBA was determined to be a compatible use on the refuge, and is planned to be part of the future Visitor Services Program. This training provides the first step toward planning for a skilled and safe dive program.

The Monument's new FWS Administrative Officer, Maylanie Hipolito, and Midway's Budget Analyst, Pat Moriyasu, attended a very productive Refuge Administrative Professionals' workshop on Kaua'i.

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Visitor Services

On May 1, the 2010 Visitor Services Schedule for Papahānaumokuākea at Midway Atoll NWR was announced. Currently, four ecotourism companies, one historic tourism company, and one educators' workshop are scheduled, for a total of 15 weeks. Other weeks are open for organized groups to experience and enjoy the cultural, historic, and natural resources of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and the Battle of Midway National Memorial. For more information on visiting opportunities, contact Monument Visitor Services Manager Tracy Ammerman, at 808/954-4814 or tracy_ammerman@fws.gov

Administrators of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Marine Debris Project grant began coordination and planning with Tracy Ammerman to develop educational materials based on the issues associated with marine debris and the project's marine debris survey research. Materials

might include fact sheets to be used onsite, web pages, and/or children's activity booklets.

A small, community-based observance was held on Memorial Day at Midway Atoll NWR. FWS staff, Chugach Industries staff, and visiting emergency response staff gathered at the "Navy Memorial" to



reflect upon and honor those men and women who gave their lives in service to their country.

Placing Wreath at Midway's Navy Memorial

Hawaiian Green Turtle



For more information, contact Papahānaumokuākea—U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 808/792-9540