



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# News Release

*Pacific Islands External Affairs Office*

300 Ala Moana Blvd., Room 5-311 Box 50187, Honolulu, HI 96850  
Phone: 808 792-9530 Fax: 808 792-9583

For Release: September 22, 2009  
Contact: Ken Foote, 808 792 9535 or 282 9442

PIEA-09-16  
RO-09-114

## **Plan to Recover Nation's Most Endangered Waterfowl Released**

A revised plan describing the actions needed to recover the nation's most endangered waterfowl species - the Laysan duck - was released today by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This revised recovery plan replaces the original recovery plan published in 1982.

"The Laysan duck has served as the role model for endangered species recovery throughout the Pacific," said Loyal Mehrhoff, field supervisor for the Fish and Wildlife Service's Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office. "Thanks to the dedicated efforts of scientists, land managers and volunteers from a variety of organizations a second population of ducks was successfully established on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge in 2004. With this plan, we hope to expand on earlier recovery efforts and guide the species to recovery."

Recovery plans describe actions considered necessary for the conservation of a listed species, establish criteria for downlisting (changing from endangered to threatened) and delisting (removing from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants), and estimate time and cost for implementing the measures needed for recovery.

The plan features recovery actions designed to assess and address threats to the Laysan duck; create, monitor, and manage new self-sustaining populations; and fill critical gaps in the scientific knowledge of the species. The recovery goal is to downlist the Laysan duck and eventually delist the species.

Previously found only on the remote island of Laysan in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, this species is one of only two endemic (found nowhere else) ducks that still exist in Hawai'i, the other being the Hawaiian duck or Koloa maoli. Currently, the Laysan duck occurs in only two locations, Laysan Island and Midway Atoll NWR, which are both part of the National Wildlife Refuge System and the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.

The total estimated population size on Laysan Island has fluctuated from seven to more than 600 adult birds in the last century. The most recent (2005) population estimate puts the Laysan Island population at about 600 birds. The population at Midway was founded with a total of 42 wild birds translocated from Laysan Island in 2004 and 2005, about 26 of which are thought to have reproduced. Ducks have been successfully breeding since 2005. The population experienced temporary set-backs in 2008 and 2009 due to outbreaks of botulism that caused the deaths of 218 ducks. The current population is estimated to be about 500 birds.

The Laysan duck was believed to be endemic to Laysan and Lisianski Islands (it was found historically on Lisianski Island, but was extirpated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century), but in 1995

evidence from bones discovered on the islands of Hawai‘i, Moloka‘i, Maui, O‘ahu, and Kaua‘i revealed that the duck once occurred in a wide variety of habitats and ranged throughout the archipelago. While other ducks such as mallards are found in the Hawaiian Islands, they are not native to Hawai‘i.

The duck was listed as endangered in 1967 because of its small population, limited distribution, and dependence upon a fragile ecosystem. The species faces high risk of extinction due to severe weather, disease, accidental introductions of nonnative plants and animals, and habitat degradation.

The duck’s risk of extinction was acute as long as it was limited to a single population; the establishment of a second population at Midway Atoll provides some initial insurance against this risk. The species’ disappearance from the main Hawaiian Islands was most likely caused by a combination of habitat loss and predation by introduced rats (and perhaps by humans). Mammalian predators, such as mongooses, cats, and rats may be the most important limiting factor in the reintroduction of the duck to other sites.

Laysan ducks are small with multicolored brown feathers and a white eye-ring, and are most active at night. The ducks are primarily insect feeders, but also feed on leaves and seeds.

Availability of a draft revised recovery plan was announced on November 4, 2004 and public comments were accepted until January 3, 2005. All information provided during the public comment period was considered in the preparation of this revised recovery plan.

The revised recovery plan is available on the Service’s website at <http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands> or by calling the Service’s Honolulu office at 808 792 9400.

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).