

Partnering to Protect and Study Monk Seals and Sea Turtles: 2019 NWHI Field Camps

NOAA Ship Oscar Elton Sette departed May 15th for a 27-day research expedition throughout the main and Northwestern Hawaiian Islands to support research and recovery of the endangered Hawaiian monk seal and threatened green sea turtle.



A small boat assists setting up field camps on Laysan Island. Photo: NOAA Fisheries

The Sette is currently deploying researchers to set up camps in the NWHI for four months. Field researchers from NOAA and six partner organizations (Kamehameha Schools, University of Hawai'i, ONMS, Office of Hawaiian Affairs, the Marine Mammal Commission, and the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources) will conduct research and conservation activities at French Frigate Shoals, Laysan, Lisianski, Pearl and Hermes, and Kure Atoll. They will also take day trips to survey Ni'ihau, Nihoa, Mokumanamana and Midway Atoll.

Over the next four months, these field teams will measure and tag all weaned seal pups, identify all individuals, conduct beach counts of seals, remove marine debris and conduct additional scientific and recovery efforts to protect the Hawaiian monk seal population. Additionally, a team of turtle biologists is

deploying to French Frigate Shoals to monitor nesting activities, assess nesting and hatching success, and measure and tag backing and nesting turtles.



Akulikuli and Maiapilo after rehabilitation at the Marine Mammal Center's Ke Kai Ola Seal Hospital.
Photo: © The Marine Mammal Center/Katie D'Innocenzo. NMFS Permit No. 18786

One of the field teams will have a special focus this year at French Frigate Shoals. In October 2018, Hurricane Walaka passed through the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and caused major damage to the islands of this atoll. East Island, where a majority of Hawai'i's green sea turtles nest and dozens of monk seals pup, was completely washed away. Over the summer, field staff will research how animals respond to the loss of this important island.

These additional efforts at French Frigate Shoals have split this year's expedition into two legs. Having a second leg will allow for more time and berth space to accommodate work with partner organizations that have research and conservation projects in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, such as state and federal agencies. The *Sette* will transport Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources staff and supplies to Kure Atoll. At Lisianski Island, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will help the NOAA team find routes through the dense vegetation that blocks the shoreline and access to monk seals. On Mokumanamana, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs will lead a small NOAA team past delicate cultural sites to access monk seal habitat.

For more information visit: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/partnering-protect-and-study-monk-seals-and-sea-turtles-northwestern-hawaiian-islands>

National Marine Sanctuary Foundation Marine Debris Video

The National Marine Sanctuaries Foundation released a seven minute outreach film to create awareness about marine debris and Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. The filming took place during a 41-day expedition in 2018 to PMNM where PIFSC researchers conducted in-water and shoreline debris surveys and removal operations at French Frigate Shoals, Laysan, Lisianski, Pearl and Hermes, Midway and Kure Atoll. Over 160,000 pounds of marine debris were transported back to Honolulu, Hawaii for appropriate recycling and disposal.



For more information visit: <https://marinesanctuary.org/blog/video-spotlighting-the-threat-marine-debris-poses-to-wildlife-in-papahanaumokuakea/>

2019 NWHI Reef Assessment and Monitoring Cruise

The 2019 RAMP cruise will take place aboard NOAA Ship Rainier during late August – early July. This would be the fourth leg of the Hawaiian Archipelago RAMP cruise which started in April 2019 in the main Hawaiian Islands. On NWHI RAMP, researchers will assess reef fishes and corals, and collect images of the ocean floor to create 3D models of the reefs.



Blue trevally (Caranx melampygus), ornate butterflyfish (Chaetodon ornatissimus), and starry-eyed parrotfish (Calotomus carolinus) over a coral reef off Maui. (Photo: NOAA Fisheries)

For more information visit: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/scientists-monitor-coral-reef-ecosystems-throughout-hawaiian-archipelago>