

NEWS RELEASE
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**World's oldest known, banded wild bird returns to Midway Atoll
in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument**

Honolulu, Hawaii — Wisdom, a mōlī (Laysan albatross) and world's oldest known, banded wild bird has returned to [Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and Battle of Midway National Memorial](#). At least 69 years old, the first observation of Wisdom at her nest sit took place on November 29. Biologists have confirmed that she has laid an egg. Wisdom and her mate are taking turns incubating the egg.

Each year millions of albatrosses return to Midway Atoll in [Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument](#) to nest and raise their young. Culturally, albatross species are kinolau (body form) of the Hawaiian deity Lono. The birds' return to land for mating coincides with the beginning of the makahiki season, occurring between October and November, and an important aspect to some practitioners' ceremonies and practices during that time.

“Every year that Wisdom returns, she is rewriting what we know about albatross longevity – and inspiring the next generation,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Monument Superintendent Jared Underwood. “Wisdom helps us better understand how long these birds live and how often they breed. This knowledge informs our management actions to ensure a future for albatrosses that rely on the Refuge and Monument.”

Wisdom and her mate, Akeakamai, like most pairs of albatrosses, return nearly every year to the same nest site. This behavior is known as “nest site fidelity” and it makes places with large colonies of nesting birds, like Midway Atoll, critically important for the future survival of seabirds like Wisdom.

Raising the next generation of albatross is no easy job. Albatross parents take turns incubating the egg or caring for the chick while the other forages for food at sea. They will spend approximately seven months on Midway Atoll incubating and raising their chick. Because this process takes up so much time and energy, most mōlī don't lay an egg every year.

However, Wisdom and her mate have met on Midway Atoll to lay and hatch an egg almost every year since 2006. Wisdom has laid between 30-36 eggs in her lifetime. In 2017, the chick that she fledged in 2001 was observed just a few feet away from her current nest, marking the first time a returning chick of hers has been documented. Countless generations of albatrosses on Midway Atoll have a similar family reunion each year.

Starting around age five, juvenile albatrosses begin the process of finding a mate. During nesting season, they are all over Midway Atoll practicing elaborate courtship dances containing dozens of ritualized movements. These young birds are looking for that special bird to dip, bow, and preen



with, and once a pair bond forms they stay bonded for life.

“Albatrosses lay one egg at a time and often take a year off between laying eggs, so the contribution of just one bird makes a difference,” said acting Midway Atoll Refuge Manager Keely Lopez. “It’s wonderful to think how much Wisdom, and other albatrosses like her, has contributed to the survival of her species.”

Nearly 70% of the world’s mōlī and almost 40% of ka’upu (black-footed albatross), as well as endangered makalena (short-tailed albatross) all rely on Midway Atoll. In addition to albatrosses, over 20 different bird species live on Midway Atoll. In total, over three million individual birds call the Refuge and Memorial home.

Throughout the Monument, scientific research and monitoring plays an essential role in managing wildlife, including seabirds. Surveys and banding projects conducted in the Monument and throughout the world help scientists better understand the life cycles and migration patterns of birds. Biologists first identified and banded Wisdom in 1956, but the very first albatross was banded on Midway Atoll in 1936. To date over 275,000 albatrosses have been banded at the Refuge and Memorial. By pairing modern data analysis with detailed current and historical records, biologists can make more informed management decisions that ensure seabirds have the habitat and resources they need in the future.

Biologists and volunteers are working to restore the habitat seabirds need at Midway Atoll and remove threats like invasive predators - because protecting the future for seabirds mean protecting the places they call home.

Located on the far northern end of the Hawaiian archipelago, Midway Atoll Refuge and Memorial is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and lies within the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. It is one the oldest atoll formations in the world, provides nesting habitat for millions of seabirds, and is a touchstone for one of the most significant naval battles of World War II, and in history, the Battle of Midway. To learn more about Midway Atoll:

https://www.fws.gov/refuge/midway_Atoll/

For photos and video, please visit: <https://bit.ly/FWSWisdomPhotos>

For more details and shareable social media about Wisdom: <https://bit.ly/PacificIslandsFWS>

Read more stories about Midway Atoll:

- [Video: Battle of Midway Commemoration Film](#)
- [The Return of Midway’s Albatross](#)
- [The Laysan Albatross: A Lovesong](#)
- [Midway Atoll: Restoring an Ecological Gem](#)
- [A Future to Count on for Albatross at Midway NWR](#)
- [Discovering Midway’s Cultural History](#)



- [War and Peace at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and Battle of Midway National Memorial](#)

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Papahānaumokuākea is cooperatively managed to ensure ecological integrity and achieve strong, long-term protection and perpetuation of Northwestern Hawaiian Island ecosystems, Native Hawaiian culture, and heritage resources for current and future generations. Four co-trustees - the Department of Commerce, Department of the Interior, State of Hawai'i and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs - protect this special place. Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument was inscribed as the first mixed (natural and cultural) UNESCO World Heritage Site in the United States in July 2010. For more information, please visit www.papahanaumokuakea.gov.

