



PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA
Marine National Monument

MEDIA ADVISORY
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Biologists Evacuated from Remote Pacific Field Station *Storm damage to Tern Island facility is extensive*

A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist and four volunteers arrived safely in Honolulu early Friday after being evacuated from their research station on Tern Island, which was extensively damaged during an intense storm December 9. The experience was frightening but no one was physically injured.

The early morning storm produced high winds that damaged all facilities on the field station 490 miles northwest of Honolulu within the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge – part of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. The living quarters, storage facilities and boat sheds suffered extensive damage as did the communication systems and solar panels. Damage to nesting birds and habitat will be determined after photographs and eye witness accounts are assessed.

The Tern Island biologists arrived in Honolulu around midnight after a two-day voyage in 20 to 30 knot winds and high swells aboard the M/V *Kahana*. The biologists were safely evacuated from Tern Island on December 18 with help from Fish and Wildlife Service employees traveling from Johnston Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. The Tern Island residents had sufficient food and water while waiting for the boat.

“We are extremely grateful for everyone’s safety and well-being first and foremost, including those involved with the shore-to-ship evacuation under very stiff wind conditions,” said Barry Stieglitz, Refuge Supervisor for the Hawaiian and Pacific Island National Wildlife Refuges. “It was a harrowing experience for our employees, including four young volunteers, as they were awakened by a freak wind burst that shook their living quarters.”

The residents told Stieglitz everything started “popping” as wood panels and windows blew out and a boat shed was completely destroyed.

“With their normal internet communication seriously compromised and a satellite phone connection that often dropped, they no doubt felt isolated,” Stieglitz said. “We are very glad to have them home.”





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Located on Tern Island within French Frigate Shoals, this U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service field station provides critical shelter and a connection with wildlife for biologists to conduct research, student-based education and restoration projects and to monitor hundreds of albatross, wedge-tailed shearwaters and Bonin petrels, including a population of Tristram's storm petrels. These biologists are also the eyes and ears that provide a year-round presence to help protect marine and island ecosystems that provide life support for most of Hawai'i's green turtle nesting population, the endangered Hawaiian monk seal and extraordinary native marine life.

The first chance Monument employees in Honolulu will have to view the damage will be from photographs the biologists carried with them onboard the *Kahana*. Upon assessing the impacts to facilities and habitat, the Service will begin to chart out next steps right after the Holidays.

To learn more about Tern Island, see www.fws.gov/hawaiianislands.

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. Three co-trustees - the Department of Commerce, Department of the Interior, and State of Hawai'i - joined by 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.

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. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfws, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfws>.

See post-storm photographs at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwspacific>.

