



PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA Marine National Monument

PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 8, 2015

CONTACT
Toni Parras 808-282-9332

Science and culture come together in first joint expedition to Papahānaumokuākea

(Honolulu) – Yesterday, 26 participants returned from Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument having completed the first-ever joint expedition expressly combining traditional navigators, cultural practitioners, and government and university researchers.

The Polynesian double-hulled sailing canoe *Hikianalia* and modern research vessel *Searcher* embarked on an expedition to conduct navigator training for future legs of the Polynesian Voyaging Society’s Mālama Honua Voyage, shoreline ‘opihi (Hawaiian limpet) counts, reef fish surveys, and exchange of ideas on how to better manage Hawaii’s marine resources.

“The best part about the joint expedition was being able to talk with the *Hikianalia* crew about ways to mālama, or care for, our ocean resources,” said Makani Gregg, cultural researcher traveling aboard the *Searcher*. “We were able to get on the shoreline with each other and count ‘opihi on some of the healthiest shorelines in the world.”

Hikianalia’s voyage to Nihoa was yet another step toward the important and necessary transition of leadership to the next generation of voyagers and navigators. For navigator Kaleo Wong, it was his first time as captain of a voyage.

“Nihoa and Mokumanamana have always been places of high spiritual mana (power),” said Wong. “Situated near the transition of pō and ao (the realms of light and dark, and life and afterlife), they remain sacred wahi pana (celebrated places) and allow us to practice many aspects of our culture, one of which is gaining vital open ocean navigation experience while remaining relatively safe in our home waters of Hawai‘i.”

Once at Nihoa, team members from *Hikianalia* and the *Searcher* surveyed reef fish habitat, conducted ‘opihi monitoring, and offered mele (chants) and ho‘okupu (gifts) to honor the islands.

“It was amazing to have such a dedicated group of people willing to participate in all aspects of this expedition,” said Hoku Johnson, NOAA expedition coordinator. “This was the first time researchers specifically collaborated on projects that have cultural, scientific and management benefit for Papahānaumokuākea and beyond.”

Chris Bird, Ph.D. and Patricia Crockett, researchers with Texas A&M University, continued their years of research on ‘opihi, a Hawaiian delicacy and culturally important species, making some interesting findings.



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“It appears that Nihoa is the ‘Fort Knox’ of ‘opihi in terms of genetic diversity,” said Bird. “This is significant because ‘opihi populations in the Monument could be more resilient to human-derived effects like ocean acidification and disease outbreaks than populations in the Main Hawaiian Islands.”

This ongoing research continues to provide managers with insights into how to make better-informed management decisions concerning ‘opihi harvesting in the Main Hawaiian Islands.

“After six years of conducting research on ‘opihi in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, it is apparent that there are 99.9% more ‘opihi on the shorelines of the Monument than those of O‘ahu,” said Bird. “On O‘ahu there is an average of one ‘opihi per square meter, versus an average of 100-200 ‘opihi per square meter in the Monument. Working in Papahānaumokuākea continues to provide insight into what a healthy shoreline should look like.”

The *Searcher* team also visited Mokumanamana and surveyed ‘opihi for the first time on the north shore of the island. Researchers collected samples of ‘opihi living near a freshwater seep on the island and discovered that those individuals spawn at a different time than those collected elsewhere on the island. In addition, the team conducted ‘opihi monitoring at Lehua in the Main Hawaiian Islands for the first time. Future research efforts will focus on understanding more about ‘opihi habitat and gene flow between islands.

The expedition was sponsored by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, NOAA’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, Polynesian Voyaging Society, Texas A& M University, The University of Hawai‘i-Hilo, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International Hawai‘i, Kipahulu ‘Ohana, Na Mamo o Muole‘a, and Na Maka o Papahānaumokuākea.

Images available upon request at

<https://drive.google.com/a/noaa.gov/folderview?id=0B7aVYWDKIMt3fkF0aTc2a2RfNHRVaWpGZENDQTgxUkVzeW5ZYVlheTl1dkQwYUhlbVZZaVE&usp=sharing>.

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.

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