



PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA Marine National Monument

NEWS RELEASE
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Short-tailed Albatross Fledges at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge

Endangered Bird's Departure Carries More Hope for the Species

(Midway Atoll, HI) For only the second time in recorded history, a short-tailed albatross has fledged outside of Japan. The fledgling was last observed June 10, 2012, exercising its wings near its nest site and taking a short test flight from Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge within the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. The young albatross has not been seen since it was observed flying so it is likely headed to the nutrient rich waters of the Bering Sea. This is a momentous occasion for species recovery efforts across the Pacific and beyond, bringing hope for other species on the brink of extinction.

This event occurred on the cusp of an emotional commemorative 70th Anniversary of the Battle of Midway ceremony held on Midway Atoll June 4, 2012. During the ceremony, USFWS Regional Director Robyn Thorson noted in her remarks that the recovery of the short-tailed albatross was attributed to cooperative recovery conservation efforts by the United States and Japan who, 70 years ago were at war. Perhaps it is no coincidence that international oceanographer Dr. Sylvia Earle noted just hours before the chick's hatching in January 2012 that Midway Atoll is a "hope spot" for the world.

The stout and amazingly tough chick is the second of its kind to hatch from a location other than Japan and now takes to the seas. After a courtship of nearly three years, last January the chick's parents, a nine year-old female and 25-year-old male, laid and successfully hatched a large whitish egg. They spent the next five months finding and bringing food to their chick every three to six days. Masters of the wind, they logged tens of thousands of miles, soaring between Midway and nutrient-rich feeding grounds 1,000 miles to the northwest. They foraged mainly from the surface on squid, fish and shrimp. Days later they regurgitated food from the sea to the chick back at the Refuge. In May, after months of steady feeding and growth, the chick lost most of its downy look and began stretching and exercising its wings. The health and strength of the chick is a testament to the care and skill of its parents.

Anticipating its fledging, Refuge biologists Pete Leary and Greg Schubert banded the chick on May 30. Assistant Refuge Manager John Klavitter sited the bird on the morning of June 10. As Klavitter captured video he saw the chick flap from the edge of an embankment, leap fearlessly into





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the air and fly 50 meters toward the emergent reef and then settle gracefully on the water. The bird then turned around and paddled back to shore and walked back up the embankment as if it had already performed several of these “practice” flights. Klavitter may have witnessed the chick’s last appearance from its home nesting island before it returns again in three to seven years to find a mate.

“Once one of the world’s rarest birds, the endangered short-tailed albatross continues to recover,” said Refuge Manager Sue Schulmeister. “Sightings of the species have been relatively rare over the years, even on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. In the years to come, following this event, perhaps that will start to change.”

Short-tailed albatross depend on the marine resources and habitats of the Monument and the North Pacific to survive. They reside seven to nine months on Midway Atoll NWR and the Japanese islands of Torishima and Minami-kojima to court, reproduce and nest, and the rest of the year at sea, resting and spending countless days soaring in search of food.

Chicks hopefully grow to become adults, all the while refining the skills necessary to live the demanding and fascinating life of their relatives across the globe — if they are able to avoid hazards faced by every albatross in our modern world: ingesting too much plastic, getting caught in a fishery long-line and marine debris or being eaten by sharks. So far Midway’s fledgling is proving it knows how to survive.

“This event is not an isolated miracle in our international efforts to expand the range and population of this species,” Fish and Wildlife Service Acting Monument Superintendent, Don Palawski, one of seven managers of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, said of the fledgling. “With diligent and vigilant care, species can return, and it reminds us of the responsibility we all have, with involvement and support of an international public, to continue to work diligently together, especially for species that are dependent upon on both the land and the sea.”

Photos and video available at www.fws.gov/Midway/whatsnew.html

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.

