

Palmyra Atoll Refuge Is Ramsar Site

Palmyra Atoll National Wildlife Refuge has been designated a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance – the first in the United States to include coral reefs.

About 1,000 miles southwest of Hawaii, the refuge is a string of 52 islets, comprising one of the most diverse and spectacular coral reef systems in the world. More than 130 species of stony corals populate the reefs. It includes 680 acres of uplands and more than 15,000 acres of submerged coral reefs and tropical lagoons. It is one of the only pristine wet atolls left in the tropical Pacific.

The lush vegetation supports over a million birds of 29 species. Palmyra also provides a rest stop for the bristle-thighed curlew, a Species of Concern. Some 4,000 miles from Alaska, Palmyra is the first place the bird rests on its journey to French Polynesia. Only 6,000 of these rare birds are thought to exist, and several hundred of them spend the winter on Palmyra.

Palmyra Atoll Refuge is one of the few remaining coral reef ecosystems with intact food chains and great biodiversity: it supports one of the last *Pisonia grandis* forests in the Pacific, particularly popular among nesting seabirds. Entry to the refuge for visitors is by Special Use Permit only. The atoll is managed jointly by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and The Nature Conservancy.

The Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. There are 158 Contracting Parties to the Convention, with 1,828 wetland sites on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.

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