



PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA
Marine National Monument

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Record Numbers of Albatross Nest on

Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge/Battle of Midway National Memorial

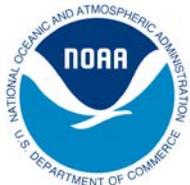
Results from the recent annual nesting albatross census on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge/Battle of Midway National Memorial within the Papāhānaumokuākea Marine National Monument confirm that Midway's nesting albatross colony is the largest in the world. Nineteen volunteers systematically covered the entire surface of the atoll's three small islands counting active nest sites from each of two species from December 11, 2014 through January 2, 2015. Their final count resulted in over 1.39 million individual birds, assuming two adults per nest, for both Laysan and black-footed albatross species combined.

This year (hatch year 2015) far surpassed any previous documented year for nesting Laysan albatross on Midway Atoll with 666,044 pairs recorded (Figure 1). The current year count for Laysan albatross represents a 52% increase over the average number for the period from hatch years 2010 to 2014. Black-footed albatross nesting pairs came in at 28,610 for the atoll, also a new record (Figure 2), up just over 18% from the 2010-2014 average. The previous high year for Laysan albatross was 2006 with 487,527 while for black-footed the previous high was 28,581 in 2011. The reference "hatch year 2015" defines the albatross breeding season from the time eggs were laid in November 2014, hatched in January 2015, and expected to leave Midway Atoll by July 2015.

"I am excited with the numbers this year that really confirm the importance Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge continues to play in this critical part of the Laysan and black-footed albatross life cycle," commented Refuge Manager Dan Clark. "Our management actions here ensure adequate nesting sites that are free of non-native predators and other invasive species so the overall success of both species' is more secured into the future."

To conduct the census, the three islands at Midway Atoll are divided into manageable sectors. The volunteers walk together in a systematic manner to ensure all nesting birds are counted. An albatross sitting on an egg in a nest is counted once and represents a breeding pair. Albatrosses present but not on an egg may be immature, unpaired or just resting individuals. These birds are not included in this census.

The numbers of nesting albatrosses on Midway Atoll fluctuate from year to year. In any given year approximately 25% of the breeding population may take a year off nesting to replenish energy reserves and complete feather molting. Sexually mature albatrosses are presumed to make nesting decisions each year based a number of complicated and interwoven factors such as ocean





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conditions, their body condition and need to molt, and environmental conditions that may affect food availability for the rest of the season.

“In the 1920s, the entire Laysan albatross population in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, where most of them historically nest was estimated to be fewer than 20,000 birds owing to illegal egg poachers and feather hunters,” noted Deputy Refuge Manager Bret Wolfe. “We’ll be closely analyzing and comparing our data with those collected at other nesting sites within Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument like Kure Atoll State Wildlife Sanctuary, to determine if this year’s numbers are an anomaly or part of a larger trend.”

An undertaking of this magnitude relies on the dedication of many volunteers who donate their time during the holiday season and share in the cost of the associated logistics. The Refuge’s non-profit support organization, Friends of Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, also contributes funding to help the Refuge host this annual count.

For graphs, photos, and video of the count effort and albatross mating and nesting activity on Midway Atoll go to: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwspacific/sets/72157649901861280/>.

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.

