



PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA  
Marine National Monument

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**Adult Short-tailed Albatross Found Dead at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge  
Battle of Midway National Memorial  
*Cause of Death Unknown***

(Honolulu) – An adult male short-tailed albatross (*Phoebastria albatrus*) was found dead Saturday, December 13 on Eastern Island within the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and Battle of Midway National Memorial, part of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. This federally endangered bird was found by a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service volunteer in an area containing short-tailed albatross decoys and where a male and female pair had successfully nested.

Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge Manager Dan Clark stated, “It is always difficult and a bit heart-wrenching to discover such an important and highly endangered bird deceased. The species is making a miraculous but slow recovery from near extinction worldwide and Midway Atoll has proven to have suitable habitat for nesting. We currently believe this male was paired with a female that produced three chicks at the same spot since 2011. How it may have died remains a bit of a mystery at this time but we remain hopeful and optimistic that Midway Atoll will continue to be a location supporting recovery efforts of the species through our seabird habitat management program.”

This male individual was first sighted in late October and was settled in amongst the decoys on Eastern Island, giving staff the impression it was one of the adults that have successfully reared chicks in previous years. His female mate has not been observed at Midway Atoll this year, yet it is not unusual for short-tailed albatross to skip a year nesting.

Tissue samples will be transported from Midway Atoll to the U.S. Geological Survey’s National Wildlife Health Center – Hawai‘i Field Station in Honolulu, Hawai‘i for further analysis with the hopes of shedding light on the cause of death.

The first documented short-tailed albatross at Midway Atoll was a single individual in 1938. After Midway Atoll became a national wildlife refuge in 1988, a “social attraction project” was implemented with the support from Japanese researchers involving placement of decoys and installation of a solar-powered calling system. By 2007, one or two short-tailed albatrosses were observed and another four birds were observed in 2008. Two years later, a female arrived and mated with a male who had been patiently returning once a year for four consecutive years. Their chick hatched on January 14, 2011 and by June 7<sup>th</sup> the chick took flight, marking the first time a short-tailed albatross chick has fledged outside of islands near Japan in recorded history. Since that time, the pair skipped the 2012 hatch year but returned and reared a chick during the 2013 and 2014 hatch years.





# PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA Marine National Monument

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 Refuge and the islands of Torishima and Minami-Kojima off of Japan 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 lines and marine debris, or being eaten by sharks.

Deputy Refuge Manager, Bret Wolfe, said of the discovery. “Although a sad find, we hope that an analysis of this rare bird can tell us more about the cause of death and further our understanding of the species.”

For photos and video on this bird’s documented history go to:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwspacific/sets/72157649422150748/>

<http://usfwspacific.tumblr.com/post/67084590890/love-at-midway-reunited-and-it-feels-so-good>

[http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Midway\\_Atoll/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Midway_Atoll/)

*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](http://www.papahanaumokuakea.gov).*

