

News Release

Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge/Battle of Midway National Memorial
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Wisdom in the Thanksgiving Season: 64-year old Laysan albatross is sighted on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge

The world's oldest known seabird returns and finds her mate!

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials are pleased to announce that the world's oldest known banded bird in the wild, a Laysan albatross named Wisdom, was sighted on November 19 on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge within Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. Just in time for the special day of giving thanks, Wisdom was spotted with her mate amongst the world's largest nesting albatross colony.

“In the face of dramatic seabird population decreases worldwide –70% drop since the 1950’s when Wisdom was first banded–Wisdom has become a symbol of hope and inspiration,” said Refuge Manager, Dan Clark. “We are a part of the fate of Wisdom and it is gratifying to see her return because of the decades of hard work conducted to manage and protect albatross nesting habitat.”

“Wisdom left soon after mating but we expect her back any day now to lay her egg,” noted Deputy Refuge Manager, Bret Wolfe. “It is very humbling to think that she has been visiting Midway for at least 64 years. Navy sailors and their families likely walked by her not knowing she could possibly be rearing a chick over 50 years later. She represents a connection to Midway’s past as well as embodying our hope for the future.”

Wisdom was first banded in 1956. And because Laysan albatross do not return to breed until they are at least five years old, it is estimated Wisdom is at least 64 years old, but she could be older. Many birds lose their bands before they can be replaced. Wisdom’s bands, however, were continuously replaced and because of meticulous record keeping associated with bird banding, we can verify she is the same bird first banded by noted author and Service ornithologist, Chandler Robbins. Biologists may find even older birds as old worn bands continue to be routinely replaced.

Although Laysan albatrosses typically mate for life, Wisdom has likely had more than one mate and has raised as many as 36 chicks. Laying only one egg per year, a breeding albatross and their mate will spend approximately six months rearing and feeding their young. When not tending to their chicks, albatross forage hundreds of miles out at sea periodically returning with meals of squid or flying fish eggs. Wisdom has likely clocked over six million ocean miles of flight time.

Information about Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge/Battle of Midway National Memorial:

<http://www.fws.gov/midway/>

Image of Wisdom and her mate on 11.21.2015: <http://bit.ly/1TfcT3r> Photo by: Kiah Walker/USFWS

Video and images of previous nesting and egg laying: <http://bit.ly/1IKdnU6>

Tumblr: <http://bit.ly/1lhYM78>

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov

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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