

The Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge & Battle of Midway National Memorial (Refuge) is accepting volunteer applications for 15-18 individuals to conduct the annual nesting albatross census. The census occurs once each year roughly between mid December and the first week in January (~20 days total). The Refuge is located within the Papāhānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, approximately 1350 miles northwest of Honolulu. Midway Atoll is the site of the world's largest albatross nesting colony as well as numerous other globally important species such as the federally endangered Hawaiian monk seal and Laysan duck. The Refuge is also designated as the Battle of Midway National Memorial honoring the sacrifice of those who fought in the Battle of Midway on June 4-6, 1942. The Refuge contains physical monuments and numerous historical properties.

Background: The work conducted by the nesting albatross census team, or “Bird Counters” on Midway Atoll provides vital information found few places on earth to researchers, managers, conservation groups and the global community interested in preserving and protecting oceanic seabirds and their nesting habitats. Since 1991, the annual census of Black-footed albatrosses or Ka'upu (*Phoebastria nigripes*) and Laysan albatrosses or Moli (*Phoebastria immutabilis*) on Midway Atoll has provided very accurate information regarding the numbers of nesting albatross pairs on the three islands at Midway Atoll. This long-term data set has become increasingly valuable since two other Northwestern Hawaiian Islands census sites (Laysan Island and French Frigate Shoals) have not been easily accessible in recent years to count albatrosses. Methods are essentially the same as they have been since the census began but as the habitat and the other species at Midway have changed through the years techniques have been adapted to collect better quality data and above all else to avoid harming any wildlife. The motto of the National Wildlife Refuge System, "Wildlife First" extends to the spirit and execution of this census. Data never comes before safety to wildlife. There is rarely a conflict since wildlife concerns come first. Census crew leaders live and breathe this philosophy and will give counters on the team good instructions on how to conduct the census with this in mind.

Duties: Although it is an incredible, sometimes “life-altering” experience being in the largest nesting albatross colony on earth at the exact time when the highest numbers of birds are present, the annual census is very hard work and requires good physical fitness, a strong work ethic, the ability to work closely with others as a team and discipline. The accuracy of the count is dependent upon the dedication of individuals working together in a team and following instructions from the team leaders. A ratio of 1/3 experienced counters (5-6 individuals who have conducted the Midway Atoll census before) to 2/3 inexperienced counters (10-12 individuals who have not conducted the Midway Atoll census) combined with 3-5 very experienced team leaders (have conducted the Midway Atoll census numerous times and are approved by the Refuge Manager as a team leader) is anticipated to be selected for each census to provide a reasonable mix of experience to the teams while providing the opportunity for qualified, new individuals to experience the “Midway magic.” The three islands of the atoll are divided into sectors (51 on Sand Island, 10 on Eastern Island, 1 on Spit). Three count teams of five persons plus at least one experienced leader each are assigned sectors to count. The sector boundaries normally are physical landmarks such as roads, tree lines, beaches, etc. The team members line up on the boundary of a sector and march across the sector methodically counting each active nest in his/her path, using a paint gun to mark each nest as counted and a tallywhacker to keep track of the total number of nests

counted. When the team reaches the opposite boundary the members “pinwheel” around the end person, line up and cross the sector in the opposite direction resuming the count. This procedure is methodically repeated until all of the nests in the sector are counted. Sectors are also often randomly selected for “recounting” quality assurance of the accuracy of count data collected. (NOTE: this is only a very brief overview of the count methodology. More specific details are explained in subsequent correspondence for those selected to participate). However, the census is **NOT** a “walk in the park”! Long gone are the days when Midway was a manicured little paradise! This is now a wildlife refuge! Most of the islands’ land area is managed as natural environments and as a result, the sectors are often difficult to traverse.

Volunteer counters are expected to work a minimum of 8:00 am – 4:30 pm daily and the only full days off during the census are Christmas and New Year’s Day. If the census is completed prior to the planned departure date, volunteers will be expected to work on other habitat restoration and cleanup tasks as assigned by FWS staff. Volunteers are also welcome to help conduct the Christmas Bird Count on Christmas Day (counting all species other than albatrosses).

Requirements: Must be physically fit with no limiting physical conditions or chronic illnesses; able to hike 6-10 miles per day over sandy, rocky, uneven substrate **in hot sun as well as cold/cloudy/rainy conditions** (note: hiking is required every day and is sometimes in open areas as well as through dense vegetation), confidently ride a bicycle several miles both day and night, sometimes in strong wind; lift 25 pounds and carry a day pack containing paint cans, supplies and sometimes a packed lunch; willing to transit open water in small craft (under the control of a certified operator) and climb a ladder from a boat onto a pier or make a “wet entry” by wading across coral rubble in order to access nearby islands. Applicants selected must be prepared to work closely with others in a positive, synergistic manner and follow directions closely; be timely and report for work when scheduled, and be willing to perform all duties in sub-tropical wind, sun, rain, cold, and humidity extremes. Volunteers selected must possess a strong work ethic, **be positive self-starters, willing to adhere to team leader directions and census protocols, and** be able to effectively (and “harmoniously”) live and work closely with a small group of diverse people for the duration of the census (~20 days).

The Refuge is a remote site and accessible only by contracted aircraft on a very limited basis. Because of the isolated nature of this work, personnel health and safety are of the utmost importance. Emergency medical evacuation from the Refuge may take at least 24 hours. **Applicants are required to carry air medical evacuation insurance such as offered by the Diver’s Alert Network (www.diversalertnetwork.org) or Emergency Assistance Plus (www.emergencyassistanceplus.com).** Midway Atoll is a small community where volunteers work and live in close proximity to FWS employees and contractors. Census volunteer housing is barracks-style shared rooms with their own bathroom/shower. Sensitivity to working in close proximity to protected wildlife and adhering to protocols and directions from FWS staff and team leaders to protect those species is a must.

Fees: Census volunteers selected are required to commit to working the entire census duration and volunteers will not be able to arrive or depart Midway Atoll other than the arrival and departure dates

selected by the Refuge. Roundtrip airfare between Midway and Honolulu at the beginning and end of the census will be provided at 60% of the current published airfare rate (approximate cost to each volunteer is \$2,000) and three meals daily are provided at a daily total flat rate of \$15. Housing at Midway will be provided free of charge by the FWS. It should be noted that current travel rates are \$3,400 round-trip flight, \$125/night lodging and \$62/day meals so the FWS recognizes the significant contribution of the census volunteers by covering the additional costs. The Friends of Midway Atoll often generously donates funding to support a portion of the costs of meals for counters during the census. Census volunteers selected are responsible for their own travel to/from Honolulu. **A current valid passport and all appropriate foreign visas for entry into the U.S. are required for volunteer travel to and from Midway.**

Volunteers are responsible for the proper upkeep of their living quarters and common spaces. Free laundry facilities and detergent are available for your use and cleaning supplies will be provided to your team leaders to maintain your rooms. Linens will be cleaned for you or changed upon request. Meals are taken at the "Clipper House," which serves very good cafeteria-style food with a wide variety of dishes, including authentic Thai cuisine, vegetarian options and a full salad bar, courtesy of Midway's hydroponic garden. There is also a small store on Midway that accepts cash or checks and provides some basic food, drinks and personal necessities. The team leaders can provide specifics about what the store typically carries. There is no ATM on Midway so bring sufficient cash or checks for the duration of your stay.

How you will be selected:

- **The application period is open from January 1 through July 31 annually.**
 - **Applicants selected will be notified by August 30.**
1. Applications will be accepted for one census at a time only and new applications are required for each year requested during the application period for each corresponding year.
 2. A small panel of census team leaders and FWS staff will convene to review applications and select those most qualified.
 3. The panel will review the application materials to ensure completeness and if the applicant meets the requirements
 4. The panel may elect to contact applicant references or call for a brief interview to determine quality of match for the census team.
 5. Applicants who have conducted the census at Midway Atoll previously will be compared to other applicants who have conducted the census regarding the last time they conducted the census, how many times they have conducted the census, and suitability to the team. The goal in selection is to provide qualified, experienced individuals an equal opportunity to participate.
 6. The panel will select well-qualified individuals who meet the requirements of the job, have demonstrated ability to work effectively on the team and can live harmoniously on a remote atoll with few residents, and who have the means to cover their portion of the trip expenses.

Although the census is tough work and requires dedication and a team effort, the experience most counters share is truly a special “magical” time. Counters enjoy excellent meals, comfortable accommodations, personalized air travel, excellent camaraderie, and the opportunity to spend time in a truly remote Pacific atoll environment dedicated to wildlife, history and culture with an amazing resident community. Participation is competitive and more applications are received every year than space available however; qualified applicants are always encouraged to apply. Applicants who are selected will be sent a packet of additional information about the Refuge, duties, particulars about the census protocol, and suggested items to bring, as well as required forms to complete. These items must be submitted before departing your residence.

HOW TO APPLY:

Send the following completed documents via email to the persons listed below:

1. Cover letter and brief résumé outlining relevant education, work experience, how you meet the requirements of the position listed above and why you are interested in participating in the Midway Atoll annual albatross census.
2. A completed form OF301a – Volunteer Service Agreement.
3. A completed Midway Atoll NWR Travel Request Form
4. Three personal or professional references (with phone and e-mail contact info).

Send the completed documents to: FWS Supervisory Wildlife Biologist Beth Flint and Supervisory Census Team Leaders Richard and Jenny Johnson at the following email addresses: **Beth_Flint@fws.gov**, **bigislandjohnsons@hawaii.rr.com**.

Alternately, hard copy applications may be mailed to Beth Flint if postmarked prior to July 31 at the following address:

USFWS Pacific Islands Refuges and Monuments Office, 300 Ala Moana Blvd., Rm 5-231, Honolulu, HI 96850, Attn: Beth Flint. For more information, call Beth Flint at 808-792-9553, Richard Johnson at (808) 896-2781 or Jenny Johnson at (808) 896-4149.