

*Dedicated to the preservation, education and history of our incredible national treasure - Midway Atoll*

## 65th Celebration of the Battle of Midway *by Avery Loy*

The US Fish and Wildlife service hosted about 1800 visitors on Midway Atoll on June 4<sup>th</sup> to celebrate the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle of Midway. The guests included six veterans of the Battle, several family members of vets, numerous military history buffs, and several dignitaries.

The Regal Princess cruise ship brought the majority of the group, sailing from Los Angeles directly to Midway. They stopped for the day of the celebration, then proceeded on to visit the main Hawaiian Islands and then back to Ensenada, Mexico. A Military History Group and VIPs arrived on flights from Honolulu.

The visiting speakers included Secretary of the Interior, Dirk Kempthorne, Governor of Hawaii, Linda Lingle, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, BJ Penn, and Admiral of the Pacific Fleet, Robert Willard.

The Atoll provided its usual spectacular display of wildlife and natural beauty. Beautiful blue skies accompanied a fairly warm, humid day that made it a little challenging for some of our visitors, who for the most part toured the island on foot. Several hundred thousand Laysan Albatross welcomed everyone with their traditional dancing and singing. The chicks were getting quite large and were about a month away from



(Photo by Paul Chang/USFWS)



Sec. of the Interior  
Dirk Kempthorne

(Photo by Paul Chang/USFWS)

fledging time.

The USFWS staff in Honolulu and on Midway had planned for months for what may have been the largest event ever staged by the Agency. As the deadline approached, NOAA and the Navy got more involved and the logistics of dealing with that many guests, even for one day, on such a remote spot was staggering. Just getting a couple of thousand folding chairs and a sound system to Midway is a major challenge.

FOMA was well represented by six members who spent about a week on Midway helping prepare for the event and getting the gift shop ready for the onslaught of visitors. Members Darlene Moegerle, Nan Len, Cathy



Lowder, and the author were invited to prepare and staff the gift shop, while members Jim and Cindy Waddington came as special volunteers to continue their help with Verbesina control and other projects to get ready for the big day. Barbara Maxfield, Chief of External Affairs from USFWS in Honolulu, and Barry Christenson, the Refuge Manager, and their staffs were all great hosts and made everyone feel welcome in spite of all that had to be done.

The FOMA gift shop is open year round for a

few hours a week, and ably staffed by resident volunteer Greg Schubert is located in the Midway Mall. For the Anniversary Celebration we set up a second store in the old boathouse, near where the Cruise Ship passengers would arrive on the tenders for orientation. Two USFWS staff members accompanied the Cruise Ship from LA



Governor of Hawaii, Linda Lingle



(Photo by Paul Chang/USFWS)

and the passengers were very well informed by the time they arrived. I think the passengers were also told that we might run out of tee shirts at the gift shop quickly, so the gift shops were the first stop for many of the arriving guests. In fact we closed the temporary shop down for a bit to encourage the guests to experience the orientation. At any rate, it was a very good sales day for FOMA as we sold about \$20,000 worth of shirts and other souvenirs. All profits go back to projects to support the Refuge. FOMA was able to contribute \$1,000 to help pay for the celebration. Many of the visitors, including the Secretary of the Interior and the

Governor, commented that Midway was one of the most interesting places they had ever been. All in all, it was a wonderful day that brought together a remembrance of the bravery of the men who fought in the Battle, and the special natural experience that is Midway.





Laysan Albatross (Photo by Avery Loy)

## Verbesina Control Program: Second Group of FOMA Volunteers Reports on Their Experiences

by Christy Finlayson

In February, FOMA's second volunteer crew headed out to help the Fish and Wildlife Service in their Verbesina management program. I accompanied and participated with the group in our primary tasks: propagating native bunchgrass (*Eragrostis paupera*) and pulling Verbesina, both enjoyable tasks because of their importance and the beauty of the very special place where we were working. We were lucky to have a diverse and interesting group of motivated volunteers that made significant contributions to controlling Verbesina on Midway – we're happy to have them share their experiences . . .



Dense Verbesina Growth - (Photo by Christy Finlayson)

**Volunteer stories and photos, pages 4-8.  
Christy's conclusion - page 5.**



*Volunteers. . .cont. from page 3.*

## **We're haunted by Midway by Heidi Auman**

What I mean to say is that my partner James Lloyd, and I were deeply affected by our experiences on Midway Atoll, as are most people who have spent any amount of time there. As you already know, it's a unique spot of sand, a parallel universe, and a very fragile ecosystem; one deserving our focused dedication.

James and I visited Midway as volunteers for FOMA's "Pulling Together Initiative", and were fortunate to have the opportunity to devote our time and sweat in five weeks of habitat restoration February through March 2007.

James' experiences from this Midway trip were different than mine. This Aussie nurse had never been to Midway, let alone the USA. He, like most Midway-philes, was quickly smitten. Where else but in paradise will birds hover over your head and cluster at your feet, Snow White-style? Where else but in utopia will you have the most exquisite beach all to yourself, with warm waves lovingly surging and frothing at your toes? And where else but heaven will you find a community of people as ideal as on Midway? Content, cheery residents, no crime or traffic, restaurant-style food three times per day with an ocean view that rivals that on your screensaver, and most of the other simple luxuries that modern society seems to forget are so vital. Yes, the work was hard, but life was easy here.

I should know. I became 'soft' living for most of seven years on Midway. In the period of 1993-2000, I experienced life on an active Navy base and through the MPC ecotourism venture. I recall manicured lawns, island-wide Christmas parties complete with choir, Buddhist Vesak celebrations, cricket matches, talent shows at the theatre, bands at the All Hands' Club, basketball leagues complete with team uniforms and parades, a bustling galley, diving for lobster, fishing for ono and ahi, swimming with dolphins, walking around Eastern Island with the Navy chiefs to collect glass balls, ballroom dancing and karate classes, ceramics nights, teaching university classes, and beach parties at the old pavilion.

Such a bittersweet homecoming, returning to this ghost



FOMA volunteer James Lloyd collects bunchgrass from the field to use in propagating this native species. (Photo by Christy Finlayson)

town. The people I remembered moved on long ago, clubs and activities were no more, the foreign national (enlisted) barracks, galley and hangar abandoned and mouldering. This time I was just a temporary visitor, a guest, and Midway was no longer my home. My confused heart would alternate from quaking with joy to be back, to breaking with grief from looking through the lens of the past.

Aside from my selfish personal laments, I believe this unique refuge is now much improved. Seen from a greater perspective, Midway's human guardians have made headway in the battle against invasive non-native plants such as *Verbesina*. Large swaths of thick ironwood forest are now cleared and thrive with healthy native plants. The once immaculate lawns are now honeycombed with Bonin petrel burrows, a welcome sign of this species' comeback. Numerous native plant seedlings flourish in and around town, thanks to the efforts of our team and those before us. No one keeps shovels near their back porch to kill the rats, because they have been eradicated. The miraculous cycle of life continues on Midway like a stoic heartbeat.

*cont. page 5- Haunted .*

*cont. from page 4- Haunted by Midway . . .  
by Heidi Auman, Volunteer*

In essence, I believe that our attitudes toward the wildlife and their habitats have evolved. Human requirements are no longer the dominant focus, although respectful honor for past sacrifices continue to be a deeply embedded theme in Midway’s story. The high value of this tiny atoll extends not only to the military history and beloved home of many like myself, but also to the preciousness of the ecosystem to the birds and other wildlife that depend on it for their survival. I was extraordinarily fortunate to revisit and offer my efforts to revere Midway as a place that shaped what I do and who I am.



FOMA volunteers Gretchen Johnson (left) and Heidi Auman prepare native bunchgrass for cloning on Midway’s North Beach. (Photo by Christy Finlayson)



FOMA volunteers Cathy Lowder and James Lloyd prepare pots for propagating native bunchgrass. (Photo by Christy Finlayson)

*cont. from page 3-Verbesina control. . .  
by Christy Finlayson*

The success of invasive species control and eradication programs often lies in their consistency and intensity. Thus it is important that we continue to support the Fish and Wildlife Service’s efforts. Please see our website for more information on how you can help:

<http://www.friendsofmidway.org/news/news.htm>

This effort was funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s Pulling Together Initiative, the Friends of Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, and Biological Conservation Assistance Program.





FOMA volunteer Heidi Auman finishes cloning a batch of native bunchgrass. (Photo by Christy Finlayson)



FOMA volunteer Todd Finlayson plants native bunchgrass to help deter growth of the non-native, invasive *Verbesina*. (Photo by Christy Finlayson)

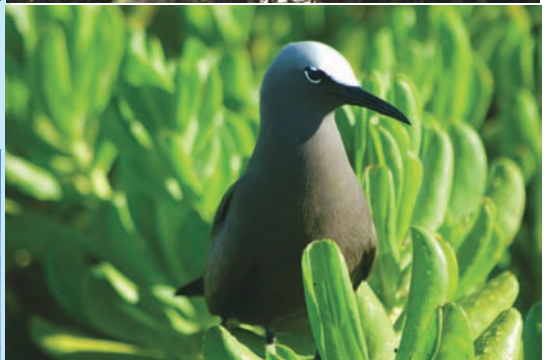


Photo Collage at right: From top: Laysan Albatross, White Tern, Brown Tern, Laysan Chick and Red-Tail Tropic Bird. Photos by Avery Loy, June 2007.



**Volunteer Account: by Todd Finlayson**

Like most visitors to Midway Atoll, I landed at night. I'd heard the stories. I had seen pictures. I knew there were birds here. I anticipated my first sighting. As the plane taxied towards the hangar, I caught my first glimpse of a Laysan albatross. Out loud, I blurted, "There's one!" A couple seconds later, the lights revealed several hundred more. I felt a little stupid.

It takes very little time to realize how special Midway is. I don't think I could define one singular high point of my time on Midway as a FOMA volunteer. The sand, the water, the aquamarine reflection on the clouds, and of course the remarkably friendly residents all left a huge impression on me. My main appreciation for the atoll, however, centered around the day by day growing appreciation for the sheer number of birds: a few thousand here, a few thousand there, a mere couple hundred somewhere else. If you saw one Laysan albatross clacking its beak at any given moment, you'd look around and see many, many more doing it elsewhere. If you saw one adult Laysan hacking-up a gooey squid into its chick's gaping mouth, you'd look around see a few others doing the same thing. It seemed like an infinitely repeated pattern of behaviors. Yet, you would be enthralled by the personalities of individual birds, particularly when they would look at you with that expression somewhere between curiosity and bad attitude... if one were to anthropomorphize.

Midway is special and the importance of the Verbesina removals was clear. This made the hours of weeding and propagating native vegetation very satisfying. I was struck by the enormity of the Verbesina problem on Midway; it would be easy to be overwhelmed by the vast expanses of yellow flowers. But seeing the progress that we made in some areas and seeing the progress that FWS had made elsewhere, it was also very possible to feel hopeful that, with continued effort, the problem is far from insurmountable.

Now, far away from the atoll, I am excited about the next phase of our project: turning our great experience on Midway into an educational opportunity to teach people about Midway and about invasive species in general.



FOMA volunteer Todd Finlayson pulls Verbesina - literally buried in his work! (Photo by Christy Finlayson)



FOMA volunteer Christy Finlayson pulls Verbesina amongst a colony of Bonin Petrel burrows - delicate work! (Photo by Todd Finlayson)





FOMA volunteer Heidi Auman plants native bunchgrass to help deter growth of the non-native, invasive Verbesina. (Photo by Christy Finlayson)



White Tern Photo: Avery Loy, 2007



FOMA volunteer Heidi Auman pulls Verbesina. (Photo by Christy Finlayson)



## MIKE'S MAGICAL HISTORY TOUR by Cathy Lowder

Recent FOMA volunteers have written about pulling Verbesina, planting bunch grass, and doing a variety of other projects. I'd like to share notes from Mike Johnson's last tour of the historical sites on Sand Island. Mike Johnson left his position as deputy Refuge Manager in March 2007 after five years working on Midway. As visitors to Midway know, the islands are full of hidden historical treasures, many just hints at the history that played out over the last hundred plus years.

Mike excitedly described the military build up on Midway and set the stage for understanding the events that played out in the Pacific, the ocean and air around Midway. With ten weeks notice that Japan was heading to Midway, the military built gun ramparts, pill boxes, bunkers, ammunition magazines and buildings to facilitate the defense of the island. The bunkers were mass produced, set up around the island and covered with sand. Electricity, water and phones for communication were added. Some of the 30+ bunkers can still be seen at Midway, covered with sand and plants, sometimes open at both ends or converted for use as storage units. .

We started near the Clipper House and North Beach

where the ruins of the Commercial Pacific Cable Company buildings are located. When the buildings were constructed 1901-1903, there was no harbor yet so the supplies were landed on North Beach and the buildings constructed nearby. The cable itself left Sand Island on the South end and headed on to Guam. With the cable finished in June, President Teddy Roosevelt sent a message on July 4<sup>th</sup> 1903 that took eleven minutes to circle the globe via the newly laid cable lines. From 1900 through the 1920s the Cable Company maintained a resident population of 20-30 people. During this time, 9,000 tons of top soil and plants were imported along with a variety of unplanned hitch hikers. They planted iron wood trees along with ornamentals and vegetable gardens. The Cable Company buildings were taken over by the military with the build up for WWII. A red cross was put on the roof of the main Cable Company building so that the building would not be bombed. Mike shared that there is evidence that the Japanese planned on using the Cable Company building as headquarters when they took control of Midway. Following the war, the building served as the school house for military dependents until the 70s. The buildings are now abandoned and sadly in disrepair.

During the 30s the Pan Am clipper seaplanes, called "flying boats," started using Midway as a refueling stop. The tourists viewed the amazing "gooney birds" and



[Picture of Mike and group in front of the Seaplane Hangar]





Pan Am constructed the Gooneyville Lodge to provide modern hotel accommodations. (The building was infested with termites and torn down).

The military presence on Midway began in the late 1930s with the blasting and creation of the harbor to provide access for ships. At the start of WWII the seaplane hanger was twice its current size and the old sliding door rails can still be observed in the concrete. Also visible embedded in the concrete surrounding the hangars are plane tie downs. The seaplane hanger was hit by enemy fire on the night of December 7<sup>th</sup> 1940 after the Pearl Harbor attack. The hanger was again hit in June 1942 and set on fire during the Battle of Midway.

We stopped to look at the power plant building, built in 1940 of concrete and reinforced steel and was considered “bombproof.” Lieutenant George H. Cannon was fatally wounded there when a bomb entered an air vent during a raid on the night of December 7<sup>th</sup> on Sand Island.

Instead of looking at rusted pieces of metal, over grown mounds of sand, rotting pieces of wood, or buildings wrapped in orange caution screen, Mike’s commentary and story telling enabled each of us to envision the events and lives that were connected to what we were seeing.

This tour really was magical as Mike brought history to life. He left us with a serious question: How do we continue to protect the many historical features of the island while developing and protecting the wildlife habitat?

## Truth or Consequences ? That was the question for FOMA President Darlene Moegerle. . .



President, Darlene Moegerle, counting receipts at the gift shop. (Photo by Avery Loy)

After such a successful sale of merchandise in our Midway stores, getting the profits home was the last thing that concerned me. After all, I had done this a couple of years ago with no problem so this year should be no different. (Little did I know!)

The first obstacle occurred when each passenger on the plane from Midway to Honolulu was given an Immigration Form. All of the spaces were easy to complete until I got to the one asking if I was carrying more than \$10,000 in currency or monetary instruments. I was in a quandary since I had over \$18,000 in my carry-on! Using my flashlight in the darkened plane, I read on the backside of the form, "...any misrepresentation of this item could result in confiscation of the entire amount". Being the good steward of FOMA funds, I wrote the total that I had counted numerous times, \$18,543.75. Satisfied that I had fulfilled my duty to both FOMA and the U.S. government, I settled back for a nap.

We landed at Honolulu some time around 1:15 a.m., if I remember correctly. Two handsome Immigration officers stepped on board and asked if anyone had any fruit, flowers or anything to declare. Knowing that I am an honest U.S.citizen, I had no hesitation in raising my hand. The only hand that went up from all the passengers! The officer came back to my seat and was surprised when I told him how much money I was carrying. Everyone on board watched as he asked me to follow him! Yikes! What had I gotten myself into?



*Moegerle, cont. page 11*

As nearly everyone else got into their family cars or government vehicles, I accompanied the officer to an upstairs room of the office. I had most of the bills counted and wrapped so as the officer retrieved the needed form that was being faxed to the him, (this procedure happens so seldom, they don't keep copies on site!) I laid the money neatly on the table. He began to count. The total didn't come out to match my total. The officer didn't have an adding machine and only a limited supply of "scratch" paper. Each time he counted and added the column of figures, he came up with a different total. I was really beginning to get anxious.

Two Fish and Wildlife folks had volunteered to take daughter, Nan, and me to our hotel in Waikiki as they went to the FWS "bunkhouse". They were patiently waiting for me to finish my session with the officer. After about 20 minutes of trying to come up with two totals that agreed, I told Lori and Ken to just go on without us. It was about 2:15 a.m. by this time. Being the kind and loyal people that they are, they told me that they would wait as long as it took!

By this time, both the officer and I were perspiring. We both recognized that I had a good reason to be carrying so much cash but rules are rules and the officer commended me for being honest. Then, back to counting. We finally came up with a figure that seemed correct except it was \$25.00 more than it should have been. I had counted that sales money so many times that I was positive I was correct. Perspiration turned to sweat! How could I possibly have \$25 more than I had when I last counted the receipts?

Suddenly, it dawned on me....I had received \$25 for a new membership!! Finally at 2:30 a.m. we both signed the form, shook hands and prepared to leave. As we were exiting, the other Immigration officer, who had had to stay on the job an extra hour and a half, said as an aside, "The next time, don't tell us!"

Whew, the problems were over. I'd go to the bank before noon, get a Cashier's check, put it in the mail to Bob and be done with worrying about this money. Yeah, right!!

Saturday, June 9 was the celebration of King Kamehameha Day in Waikiki. The streets were lined with thousands of people enjoying the colorful parade. Nan and I tried to look casual and nonchalant as we carried the windfall to the nearest bank. It was closed. I asked a police officer for the nearest bank. He directed me to what turned out to be an ATM! Not exactly what I was looking for.

Finally, I found a branch of the Bank of Hawaii that was open. They could not or would not take that amount of money for a Cashier's check. Cindy and Jim had told me

that they would be happy to deposit the amount in their account and then write a check to FOMA, so I was sure that my troubles were about over. Not so! The clerk informed me that a deposit of that amount could not be made into their account. Why?... I don't know! He suggested that I wait until Monday and go to the main bank for a Cashier's check. What was I supposed to do with the money until Monday?

Finally, I decided that I was being paranoid. I would just put the money in the room safe and pray that it would be OK. And that we did, however, each time I came back to the room, I checked the safe to make sure the money was still there.

Monday, we headed for the main bank in Waikiki. Nope, they couldn't give me a Cashier's check for that large amount. After telling my story to three different people, each higher in authority at the bank, we finally met someone that calmed all my anxiety by suggesting that all could be solved easily by opening an account in my name and then writing a check on the account. Voila! All that was required was that I have a balance of \$100 in the account after I write the check. No problem! At that point, I would have paid \$100 just to get rid of all that cash!

Then the counting began again. I assured the lady that I had the correct amount and even showed her a copy of the Report of International Transportation of Currency or Monetary Instruments that I had received at the airport. A nice smile but the counting continued. Continued that is until 3 or 4 of the \$20 bills were placed aside. The quizzical look on my face brought the information that these bill were probably counterfeit!! Good grief, what else could go wrong? The suspect bills were given to two other bank officers who concurred that they were possibly counterfeit. I asked how they could tell and was told that it was in the "feel" of the paper.

After about an hour at the bank, we left with a new bank account for me in Hawaii and the caution that if the bills did turn out to be fake, that amount would be taken out of my \$100 balance. At that point, I would have agreed to anything! Finally, we left the bank, headed to the post office and got the check in the mail to Bob!!

So far I have heard nothing from the bank, so I am assuming that the money was not counterfeit, after all.

A word of advice to the next person who brings a large amount of money from Midway. Keep your mouth shut, put the cash in the room safe, pray, deposit the money in your own account when you get home and send the treasurer a personal check!!



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Albatross chick and Hawaiian Monk Seal share the beach. (Photo Avery Loy)



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Newsletter © Summer 2007*