

# Gooney Gazette II

Dedicated to the preservation, education and history of our national treasure - Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument - MIDWAY ATOLL

Friends of Midway Atoll Newsletter

Summer 2008

## ■ Manager's Report

by Barry Christenson



**Refuge Manager,  
Midway Atoll NWR**

It's now the time of year when all the work of the past eight months shows a dividend if you are a Laysan or Blackfooted albatross at Midway Atoll. Your chick which you have fed with countless foraging trips over the North Pacific is losing the

last of its down and trying its awkward wings with the first efforts of flight.

As I write this it is late July and most of the fledglings have gone – fly or die is the term we use here on the island. Most of the adults, but not all, have stopped coming and the chicks are hungry and working their way to the beach. Watching “first flights” is a common past time at this time of year for island residents. They are usually short, only a hundred yards or so before they set down in water for the first time. Many of them don't make it, but it is a joy to see the successful ones riding the waves near the reef or out on the ocean. We put satellite tags on a few chicks again this year, and many were hundreds of miles away in only 4-5 days. It appears that their flying skills come quickly after those first tentative trips.

The next few months are always quiet biologically here at Midway without the albatross, but in reality there are still thousands and thousands of birds here. The sooty tern colony is in full swing with chicks just hatching so Eastern Island is a loud raucous place! And white terns seem to be having a banner year with chicks and nests in far greater numbers than the past few years.

As the season changes here at Midway once again, it seems an appropriate time to be making changes for myself as well. I will be leaving this week for my last trip on the G-1. I am transferring to the Regional Office

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## ■ Midway Photo Credit

Pete Leary - whose great photos are featured in this newsletter spent a year on Midway and took over 57,000 photos. He has a biology degree from Montana State and Masters's in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology from the University of North Dakota. Read more about Pete and view his fabulous photos on his website: [peteatmidway.blogspot.com](http://peteatmidway.blogspot.com)

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# More than 100 rare Laysan ducks found dead . . . . .



More than 136 endangered Laysan ducks have been found dead at Midway Atoll. The first dead duck was discovered August 10, and since then 136 adult and adolescent bird carcasses had been found, according to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Avian botulism has been confirmed as the cause of death according to Matt Brown, Acting Refuge Manager at Midway.

The Laysan duck is the rarest native waterfowl in the United States, with estimates indicating that fewer than 1,000 survive. "We sincerely hope we have seen the worst of this outbreak, and that our Midway population of Laysan ducks will rebound quickly," Brown said.

Avian botulism is caused by a bacteria that produces a toxin when certain conditions are present, including stagnant water, warm temperatures and decaying vegetation. The disease paralyzes birds' voluntary muscles, leading to drowning or asphyxiation.

Avian botulism is not a threat to humans. Wildlife officials are trying to reduce water stagnation in areas where the dead birds were found by adding large amounts of fresh water. The carcasses are being collected and burned to reduce further spread of the disease.

The Laysan duck population at Midway was estimated at 200 birds in December, but their numbers had nearly doubled since a successful hatching season. The remaining population on Laysan Island is about 600 ducks.

## Kure Atoll

Hawaiian: Kanemiloha'i

FOMA Board member Cindy Waddington and her husband Jim spent six weeks on Kure and Green Island this summer doing volunteer work.

We hope you will enjoy reading about their interesting adventures in a four-part story. This newsletter will include the first three installments of their experience. Part four will be included in the next newsletter. I've taken the liberty to edit the journals to fit our newsletter space constraints.

Kure, named after a Russian navigator, is the northwestern most island of the Hawaiian Archipelago. It is 1,200 miles northwestward of Honolulu and 56 miles west of Midway Islands.



## A Day In the Life . . . on Kure Atoll

Sunday, July 20 Part 1

By Jim and Cindy Waddington

In a word, it's GREAT! Life here is made comfortable and pleasant due to

since arriving. Dunes surround the island and thick dune shrubs (naupaka) top them so we cannot see the ocean from the interior of the island.

The beach is littered with marine debris that encircles the island but it is largely off limits because Kure is home to about 10% of the

area and the biologist in charge of the field camp has a bedroom in this building. A second building holds a large cistern (about 15,000 gallons), and the remaining building houses a tool shed. A native plant nursery is beside the shed.



So far our work has been pulling verbesina (Golden Crown Beard), which covers about one third of the island, propagating native grasses and morning glory in the nursery, and out planting. It has been too windy to spray herbicide or to do the lagoon work (dolphin surveys and marine debris snorkels). Sunrise is around 7:00 am and it doesn't get dark until well after 9:00 pm. So the workday goes until 6:00 pm and dinner is around 7:00 pm.

Cindy has become the resident meteorologist. She climbs to the roof of our office building three times each day and records the temperature, wind speed, barometer, rain gauge, relative humidity, cloud types and wind direction.

several factors: a congenial crew, the lack of pesky insects and abundant fresh water. Green Island was a Coast Guard Loran station from 1961 until 1992, which explains why there is an abandoned airstrip on the island. A smaller sand bar, appropriately named Sand Island is the only other landmass in the lagoon. The lagoon is a perfect circle of fringing reef about 6 miles across with beautiful aquamarine water.

The camp is in the middle of the island and our work so far has been primarily terrestrial because of the 15-20 mph winds we've experienced

remaining endangered monk seal population. A couple of the females are nursing pups right now and do not leave the beach during this process.

We're living in large camp tents with plenty of room and ventilation. We sleep on cots with thick thermo-rest pads and have been issued linens, pillows and towels. Luxury camping! Surrounding our camp are several large ironwood trees in which perch giant frigate birds, red footed-boobies, and white terns. There are a few albatross chicks around which are practicing their "take-offs" too.

The Coast Guard left a few buildings standing. We use one for our kitchen/dining room/office

We all share in the cooking duties and the food has been phenomenal. Cynthia, the field camp supervisor, is an excellent cook and has stocked the pantry with every conceivable grain, canned good, etc. We do not have fresh food but there are two solar powered freezers so we have frozen berries, vegetables, etc.

We use rainwater for hand laundry and bucket baths. We burn all of our trash (including even toilet paper) that's combustible and everything else will be shipped out on the NOAA ship in August.

### Kure Part II

By Jim and Cindy Waddington

The winds died down so we had our first taste of marine debris work. We were taken a few miles out to the edge of the emergent reef (the boundary between the atoll and the open ocean) where a sailboat had sunk earlier this year (the Grendel), its skipper was never found. The ghostly mast still sticks out of the water.

Our survey was to be as close to the emergent reef as possible since the debris gets hung up on the coral as it enters the lagoon. However, that is where the water is most turbulent as it crashes over the emergent reef. The only debris we were looking for was nets and lines.

We were issued knives to slip under our wet suits at the wrist, since most of this type of debris would have to be cut off the coral. When we found debris there was a dizzying amount of data that would have to be collected before removal could begin (here is just a sample as I can't recall it all): a picture would be taken of it in the shallow surge, measurements, type of debris, depth, volume, description of the coral it was attached to, description of the ocean bottom, GPS point, etc. Meanwhile on the boat they would take wind speed, depth of water, water temperature, etc. We had a waterproof clipboard to record it all. The lagoon revealed a coral wonderland. The health of the coral is excellent and a variety of coral heads in green, lavender, pink. Lots of reef fish.

One day on the beach we encountered some really gnarley nets which

required a fair effort to remove. We were all lopping at the ropes and using knives to cut it into manageable pieces. Then we dragged each piece onto the beach, it took three trips to transport the net mess to the pier. Later we floated each piece to a davit (hoist) on the pier where it took several



*Photo Credit: Pete Leary*

of us to get it up the 10 feet or so to the pier. Later this summer a NOAA ship will remove the debris.

We all assisted with a "dolphin survey", Kure has a pod of about 200 spinner dolphins that reside in the lagoon. The dolphins put on quite a show.. jumping, spinning and generally showing off.

Those were the week's highlights. We pulled a lot of weeds, sprayed herbicide (Round-up™) on fields of Verbesina (probably brought here by the military), burned piles of weeds that had dried up, did our share of cooking and a daily bucket of laundry.

The temperatures have hovered between 77° and 82°, but the humidity is high, always around 80%. We really notice the ever changing cloud formations here... possibly because nothing blocks the sky and Cindy has had to learn her cloud formations for her weather reports. They have created some phenomenal sunsets. As the new moon approaches we'll be breaking out the star charts and hoping for a clear night as there is no ambient light here.

Aloha.

## Kure Part III

By Jim and Cindy Waddington

Another windy week and occasional heavy squalls blowing through... mostly at night. We have captured 50 gallons of water for the nursery and bathing!

Our daily routine: rise at 6:30, which is just before dawn here, and have a breakfast of granola, homemade yogurt, canned fruit and coffee. We wash dishes in three wash tubs (pre wash, wash water, rinse water) with chlorinated water and we can enjoy the birds as entertainment as we wash. The waste water from washing is then carried to a native morning glory plant to give it a drink.



the dunes to the planting site.

*Photo Credit: Pete Leary*

We head out into the field around 8:15 or so to pull Verbesina, it pulls easily and you can see results fast. Unfortunately, the seed bank is extensive and 50% of what we pull will grow back by next summer. However, the hope is that the native ground cover will prevail and our out plantings will have a chance in these cleared areas.

While walking and doing a shore bird count, two Galapagos sharks were spotted a few feet from shore. Several monk seals and a green sea turtle basked on the beach. We also found a few glass balls that are used as fishing floats. Meanwhile the noddies, boobies, terns and frigates soared above us. So much wildlife to see!



We return for lunch and have a chance to do laundry. Afternoons consist of pulling Verbesina, nursery work or out planting. Because out planting involves a lot of watering it isn't always practical to transport plants and water by foot. So on one occasion we loaded 200 plants, 15 five gallon buckets of water and the six of us into the rather small boat for a 300 yard trip to the nearest beach landing to the planting site. The boat sat so low in the water! Once we landed and unloaded, all of the plants and water had to be carried up and over



### ■ Debris Project Update

Midway Beach Debris Monitoring  
by Seba Sheavly

Debris monitoring activities on Midway were launched successfully in June by Midway Refuge staff and volunteers. Under the direction of Matt Brown and John Klavitter, Midway volunteers have started conducting the monthly surveys and have completed the “mark & recapture” exercise for the summer “season.” The volunteers were Dana Crompton, Brent Newhouse, Kristin Broms, Suzie Lord, Dan Witt and Ann Warner.

There are a total of seven monitoring sites for this study. On Sand Island, four – 150m monitoring sites for monthly assessments of beach debris and two – 50m sites for a “mark and recapture” experiment to track the movements of debris weekly have been set up with one 150m beach monitoring site on Eastern Island. The volunteers use special data cards to record information on the debris that they track.

The volunteers also collect samples of various “unknown pieces” of plastic debris for chemical analysis by Dow Chemical. Learning what type of plastic these pieces are composed of will help us to connect them to their original forms. That will enhance our ability to address the behaviors that have resulted in the deposition of these products – and that is how we will make headway with this problem.

Efforts continue in refining the sampling protocol and data collection process for this project. The next team of volunteers will be coming to Hawaii in mid-November and we will conduct a training exercise for those new volunteers on Honolulu before they head out to Midway.

### ■ FOMA Appoints Scott Fisher to Board



Scott is busy banding a Shearwater at Waihe'e-Maui

Scott Fisher grew up in Kula, on the island of Maui. At age 17 he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps and served in the infantry for four years. The majority of his service was overseas, with tours of duty including Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, Fort Sherman, Panama, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm) and Okinawa, Japan.

After his discharge from the Marine Corps, Scott studied philosophy and religion at Colorado State University, graduating cum laude in 1996. Scott's graduate work includes an M.A. in peace studies with a concentration in native Hawaiian strategies of peacemaking and reconciliation. His Ph.D. explored the dynamics of post-conflict recovery in a nine-year civil war on the island of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea. Much of the focus of his doctoral work explored how communities make wise decisions about natural resource issues.

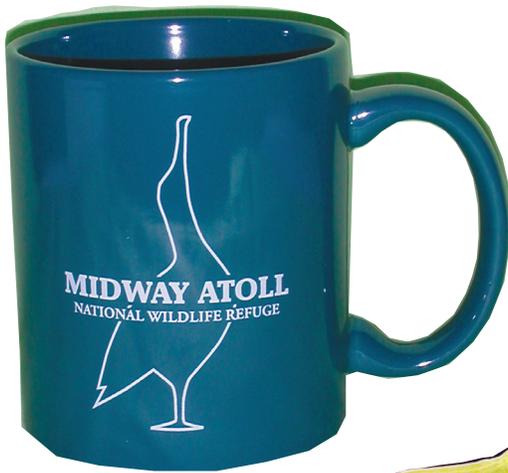
In 2003 Scott and his family moved home to Maui where he began working for the Maui Coastal Land Trust. Since 2003 he has been a project manager at the land trust's 277-acre Waihe'e Coastal Dunes and Wetlands Refuge, where he has led the ecological restoration and archaeological preservation of the refuge.

He is currently enrolled in a distance-education, post-doctoral ecological restoration program through the University of Idaho. Additionally, he was appointed by the governor of Hawai'i to sit on the Maui/Lana'i Island Burial Council, which addresses the appropriate disposition of native Hawaiian remains.

He also serves as a board member of the Hawai'i Wetlands Joint Venture. Scott lives in Pukalani with his wife Sherry and his seven year-old and three year-old daughters.

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in Sacramento, CA where I will work as Operations Chief for the Refuge System in California and Nevada. This is a staff position where I will help the 50+ refuges there gain the resources and support they need to do their job. It will be challenging and a learning experience.



I will miss Midway. It is an incredible place with spectacular wildlife and great people. Midway's history is well known and one of which we are proud. But her future has the potential to far exceed the glories of the past. With your continued support, I am confident that Midway will continue to move forward and fulfill its mission for wildlife and people. Thank you

for all that you have done during my time here and for all that you will continue to do. I will remain a member of FOMA and know that I can count on your Board to keep us informed about all the great things that will happen in the next few years and beyond.

Thanks for allowing me to be a part of it. Barry Christenson. Aug. 2008.

■ **Board Notes:** The board would like to give a sincere thank you to Barry Christenson for his hard work as Midway Refuge Manager, and congratulations to Matt Brown former deputy Manager, who is now Acting Refuge Manager. The board also gives a hearty thank you, and good bye to both Christy Finlayson and Beth Sweeney, who were diligent and active board members. We appreciate your contributions to the organization and hope you will continue to keep us updated on your career accomplishments.