

# GOONEY GAZETTE II

Friends of Midway Atoll NWR

Winter 2017/2018 Edition



# GOONEY GAZETTE II

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By Eric Baker

Continuing a series of artwork inspired by and created on Midway Atoll NWR, Eric Baker recounts his volunteer experience through a series of postcards capturing the day-to-day life and times on the Refuge.

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By Barry Christenson

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#### **Friends of Midway Atoll NWR (FOMA) Battle of Midway National Memorial**

Our Mission: "To support Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge / Battle of Midway National Memorial in its efforts to preserve, protect, and restore the biological diversity and historic resources of Midway Atoll, while providing opportunity for wildlife-dependent recreation, education, cultural experiences, and scientific research."

**FRONT COVER:** Laysan Albatross (*Phoebastria immutabilis*) are one of the most popular birds on Midway Atoll NWR—indeed, more than 1 million of them! Rebounding from a severe population decline in the 1990s and early 2000s, Laysan Albatross are among the few albatross species in the world that are relatively stable. 98% of the world's Laysan Albatross breed in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, with an estimated 71% of the population breeding on Midway Atoll NWR. Cover art by past USFWS volunteer Eric Baker.

# GOONEY GAZETTE II

Winter 2017-2018 Edition

Newsletter Designer/Producer: Wieteke Holthuijzen

## Friends of Midway Atoll NWR

### OFFICERS

President: Wayne Sentman

Vice President: Helen Dunlap

Treasurer: Jon d'Alessio

Secretary: Michael Logan

### DIRECTORS

Ann Bell

Barry Christenson

Fern Duvall

Wieteke Holthuijzen

Teya Penniman

Rob Shallenberger

### VISION

Friends of Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge plays a pivotal role in the conservation and restoration of Midway's natural and historic resources through financial and volunteer support, dynamic outreach and education, effective advocacy in the support of Refuge programs, assistance in the development of an inspirational visitor program, and productive collaboration with diverse partners.

### VALUES

- Focus on highest priority actions
- Be a voice for our members
- Share science-based information
- Operate with integrity
- Be accountable with our actions and resources

### CONTACT US

Join us online at

[www.FriendsOfMidway.org](http://www.FriendsOfMidway.org)

Find us on Facebook

"Friends Of Midway Atoll NWR"

Email our President

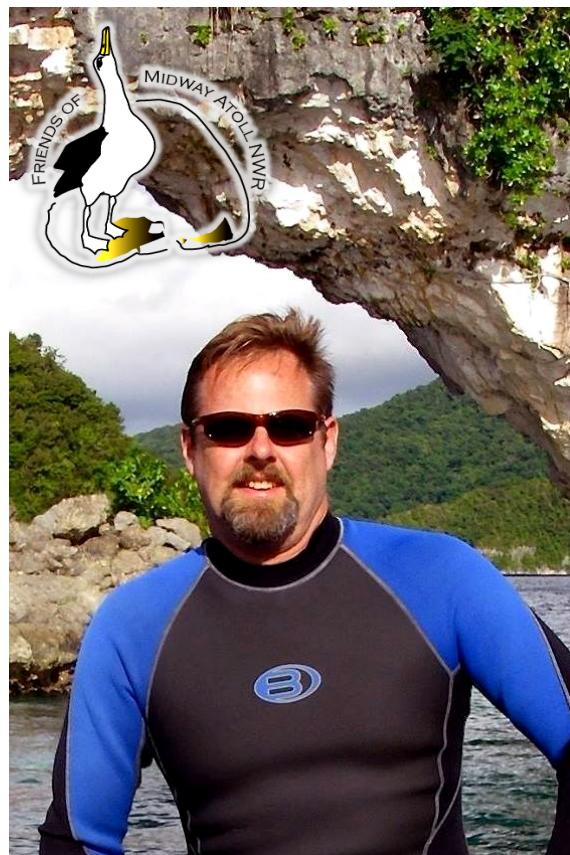
Wayne Sentman

naturefinder@mac.com

Drop us a note

17 Katrina Lane

San Anselmo, CA 94960



Top right: White Tern, Rob Shallenberger. Bottom right: Eastern Island, Dan Clark/USFWS.

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

2017 was another amazing and challenging year out on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and the Battle of Midway National Memorial. Friends of Midway Atoll (FOMA) had the distinct pleasure of working alongside the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Navy to assist the Refuge in commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the Battle of Midway. During the year we also learned more about how invasive mice have recently been harming adult albatross while they incubate their eggs during the winter months, and how the Refuge is making plans to combat this new threat to the colony. Hatch Year 2017 had the second highest numbers of nesting Laysan Albatross ever recorded on Midway Atoll NWR, while Hatch Year 2018 saw a cancelled plane schedule resulting in a reduced albatross nest count effort for the first time in almost 2 decades.

In 2017, we have also been made more aware of just how valuable uniting Friends groups across Hawai'i and across the country can be when a new administration drastically cuts budgets, threatens to reverse prior protections, and seemingly is willing to place a reduced value on conserving America's natural treasures and resources for future generations. As FOMA nears its 20th Anniversary (2019), we need your support and membership now more than ever. Your donations and your voice as a united community are what allows us to make a difference year in and year out. Only a month into 2018, and FOMA has already pledged nearly \$8000 to help the Refuge rebuild the greenhouse roof that was recently damaged in a winter storm, and we will surely be called on again to assist with other needs. Thank you all for your continued interest and support for the hard work that happens year after year out on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and the Battle of Midway National Memorial.

Aloha and hau'oli makahiki hou,

Wayne Sentman, FOMA President (Midway Atoll Resident 1998–2002)

# Postcards *from* Midway

*Illustrations and text by Eric Baker, 2016/2017 Midway Atoll NWR Biology Program Volunteer*

Working on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge comes with its own set of unique requirements. Sometimes those requirements are very specific. If I intended to run off to a little island in the middle of the Pacific

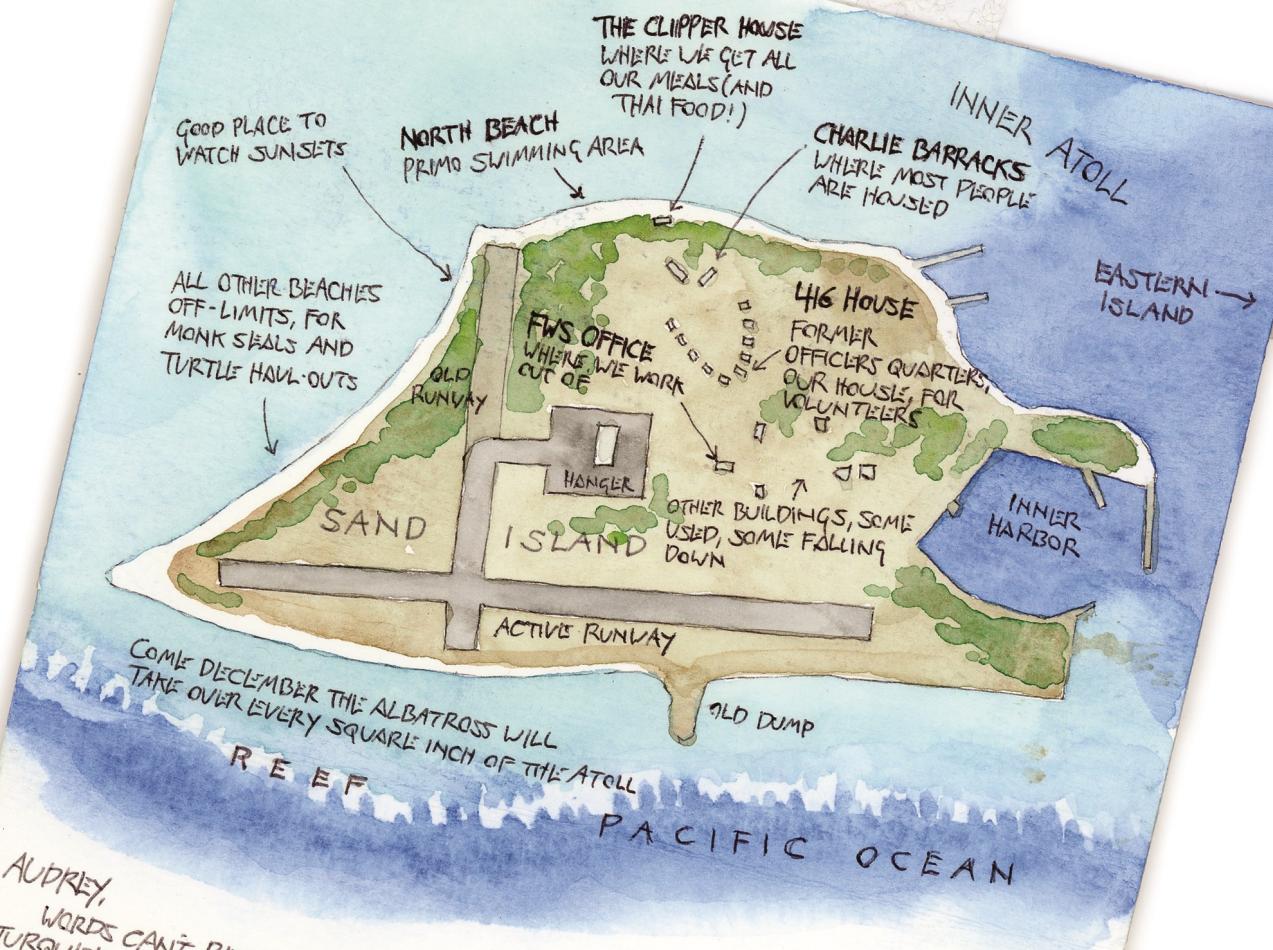
Ocean for six months, my wife Audrey made it very clear that I would have to send home postcards. Not just any postcards—real postcards—hand-made, watercolor postcards. For a chance to work as a Biology Program Volunteer on Midway Atoll, that was a requirement I was happy to comply with.

Midway Atoll NWR is unique in many ways. Unlike other places where I've done fieldwork, you aren't burdened by the daily grind of chores like cooking and tending camp. A support staff of about forty people ensure you get three meals a day, running water, and a bed with a roof over your head. That support allows volunteers the opportunity to pursue lots of other activities in their free time. Mine was to produce enough postcards so that I wouldn't be disowned when I returned home.



A Black-footed Albatross (Ka'upu - *Phoebastria nigripes*), one of the first to return to Midway Atoll NWR to breed, pants in the midday heat.

# MIDWAY ATOLL 101



AUDREY,

WORDS CAN'T BEGIN TO DESCRIBE WHAT A MAGICAL PLACE MIDWAY ATOLL IS. TURQUOISE WATERS MELTING INTO BLUE SKYS, AND EVEN THOUGH THE ALBATROSS HAVE LEFT FOR THE SEASON, THERE ARE STILL THOUSANDS OF BIRDS HERE. BONIN PETRELS DARKEN THE SKY AT SUNSET, WHEN THEY RETURN TO THEIR BURROWS, WHICH TURN MOST OF THE ISLAND INTO SWISS CHEESE. YOU HAVE TO PICK YOUR WAY CAREFULLY THROUGH THEM, AND STOP AND DIG OUT THE BURROW IF IT COLLAPSES, IN CASE THERE WAS A PETREL INSIDE. WHITE TERN'S ARE EVERYWHERE AND HOVER OVER YOU, EXPECTING TO BE FEED.

I HAVE THE MAIDS ROOM, OUT BEHIND 416 HOUSE WHERE WE LIVE, AND THE GIRLS HAVE THE REST OF THE HOUSE. IT HAS ALL THE AMENITIES WE NEED, SO FIELD WORK HERE IS PRETTY PLUSH WHEN IT COMES TO LIVING QUARTERS, UNLIKE NAKED

ISLAND. AND OF COURSE WE HAVE THAI FOOD, PLUS THE USUAL FARE, PREPARED FOR US THREE TIMES A DAY. AND WE GET AROUND THE ISLAND BY BICYCLE, MINUS PRETTY COOL. WE'LL FIGURE OUT THE PHONES NEXT.

LOVE,



ISLAND, PREPARED FOR US THREE TIMES A DAY. AND WE GET AROUND THE AND AT LEAST THE EMAIL IS WORKING NOW.

The author's first postcard; a watercolor image on top and a message below. They were folded in half, taped shut, and mailed home.



Sitting on a tidy nest of Ironwood needles, a Laysan albatross (*Mōlī* - *Phoebastria immutabilis*) incubates its egg outside the disused WWII Seaplane Hanger.

Starting with a map of Sand Island, a sort of “Midway 101” to provide an overview of my new home, I tried to create a postcard every two weeks, roughly coinciding with the supply flights from Hawaii. Midway no longer has a post office, so mail is flown back to Hawaii to be mailed. No unique “Midway” postmark—just an unremarkable “Honolulu” cancellation.

Painting on Midway has its own unique challenges. It’s nearly always windy. The sun beats down unmercifully. And the coral sand sticks to everything. During the winter season, there’s rain ranging from torrential downpours that can last for days to brief squalls that can come and go in seconds. Rain and watercolors don’t mix very well.

I always endeavor to paint my subjects from life, but that purist ethos wasn’t always possible on Midway. More than once I had to abandon a



A Red-tailed Tropicbird (Koa'e 'ula - *Phaethon rubricauda*).

watercolor because of the weather, or sometimes my subject would be very rude and simply walk away. Because of this, a number of postcards went unfinished, and some had to be completed inside the dry confines of the 416 House, where volunteers live. But, but for the most part, my subjects were cooperative and patient.

One is never more than an arm's length away from an albatross during their breeding season on Midway Atoll NWR. As volunteers, we were constantly interacting with birds during our habitat restoration duties. But sitting quietly in a field of albatross was a much more intimate and revealing experience. The naturalists' mantra of "sit quietly and let nature come to you" is no more evident than here.

Amid a sea of albatross, watercolor tablet and paint set in hand, I realize that the thousands of seabirds surrounding me are, in fact, thousands of very distinct individuals. That albatross nesting over there, for instance, has a much longer bill than the one next to it. The subtle shading on their beaks—starting as a brilliant yellow at the base, fading slowly into a flesh tone, blending into grey, and finally culminating in a glossy black tip—varies ever so slightly among individuals.

The social interactions of colony life go on all around me as I paint. Birds gather in groups of two or three, raucous little groups bill-clacking, mooing, dancing and performing their carefully choreographed moves, in hopes of finding just the right partner. Nesting



Our "Porch tern," a White Tern (*Manu-o-Kū - Gygis alba*) that was raised on the porch railing behind the 416 House.

pairs gently preen each other. Nervous parents get up, check their egg, then securely settle themselves back onto their nest. The young non-breeders are especially curious. They can't resist coming over to investigate what I am, heads tilted back and cocked to one side, scrutinizing me as if through a pair of bifocal glasses. There is tugging to be done to complete their investigation. Clothing, loose straps, or the end of a paint brush need to be grabbed with their beak and yanked, to properly determine their nature.

Working with the other volunteers on Midway was the chance of a lifetime. But I will always cherish the long hours I spent alone in the field, painting, observing, and simply taking in the experience of being immersed in the natural world that surrounded me. Where else can you sit only inches from a bird in the wild—literally—and paint its likeness? And my wife has the postcards to prove it. ☐



A Laysan Albatross returns from the sea.



# Book Review

*A Perfect Day for an Albatross*  
by Caren Loebel-Fried

By Barry Christenson, FOMA Board Member (art from book)

Award-winning children's author Caren Loebel-Fried has written and illustrated a book about Laysan Albatrosses on Midway Atoll NWR that will surely lead her to more praise and awards. *A Perfect Day for an Albatross* is a children's book—but, it is also so much more.

To anyone who has spent time on Midway Atoll NWR or any other location where albatrosses breed, Caren's artwork, text and context will lead them back to the wonders, sights, and sounds of a bustling albatross colony. For a young child, this introduction into that world will surely open a young mind to a realm of sand, sounds, and sea—dominated by what can only be considered one of nature's most engaging and amazing

birds. Albatross behavior—biologically the most dominant feature of Midway Atoll—is described in a simple, straightforward manner that, despite the brevity of the precise text, does an impressive job of capturing the various elements of albatross individual behaviors and interactions. Frankly said, it is spot on throughout.

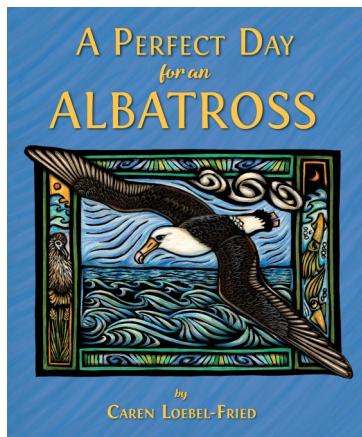
As engaging and biologically correct as the text is, it pales in comparison to the absolutely amazing block prints that jump from each page and transport the reader to a land of wonder. The colorful prints serve not only to enhance the simple yet concise and descriptive narrative that follows Mālie the albatross during her “perfect day,” but also give the reader a colorful and artistic interpretation of the beauty of Midway Atoll.



A careful reader will learn about many of the other animals and plants that are such an integral part of Mālie's world. And the physical world is not overlooked as text and artwork combine to teach the reader about sand, wind, waves, storms and the vast Pacific Ocean as key elements of Mālie's environment.

At the end of Mālie's "perfect day," the author provides a five-page appendix that will not only teach young readers (and in many cases, their parents) more about Laysan Albatrosses, but which does so in a manner that is completely engaging and enjoyable. The book delves deeper into marine ecology and explores the vast Pacific Ocean and its inhabitants through the following sections: "Where is Midway Atoll," "What Do The Names of the Albatrosses Mean in This Book," "Life on the Wind and Sea," "Raising a Family," "Life Can be Hard for Albatrosses," "How Can You Help," and "Where Can You See a Laysan Albatross?" Lastly, Caren's book features a section asking readers to find other plants and animals cleverly depicted in the prints. All of these additional educational materials combine beautifully, piquing the reader's interest and encouraging her or him to learn more about albatrosses and the threats they face in today's world.

Caren Loebel-Fried's book is published by Cornell lab Publishing Group, part of the prestigious Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Also, be sure to check out the book's back matter, which includes a Bird QR link to watch live albatrosses on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology HD cam in Hawai'i. This book is available through the Cornell Lab as well as Amazon—and hopefully at a local bookstore near you! ☐



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# Moving Forward

## 2017 in Review

By Wayne Sentman, FOMA President



Photo by Rob Shallenberger

In our 18th year, the Friends of Midway Atoll NWR and the Battle of Midway National Memorial (FOMA) has had a 12-month period bookended by the making of modern history on the Refuge, and the remembrance of Midway's vital role in WWII. Midway Atoll NWR stayed squarely in the public eye through much of 2017. The Refuge was celebrated for both the natural treasures currently protected within the Refuge and throughout the surrounding Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, and for the valor and sacrifice made 75 years ago during the Battle of Midway. In a year such as this, we are reminded of just how unique this particular National Wildlife Refuge and Battle of Midway National Memorial truly is. Further, it serves to reinforce the mission of FOMA and the commitment we have as a nation, to both protect our endangered and threatened flora and fauna living there today, and to hold sacred the valor and sacrifice of those who served and fought 75 years ago, protecting the generations to come.

As an organization, FOMA had a very successful year. We oversaw the successful transition of our Board of Directors, as four new board members adeptly filled roles vacated by 3 outgoing long-term board members. One of our Board Members (Wieteke Holthuijen) spent the year working on Midway Atoll NWR as an AmeriCorps member through Kupu (a Hawai'i-based conservation non-profit). She served as an important connection to the on-the-ground work being carried out on the Refuge. Having a FOMA Board Member out on Midway Atoll NWR was extremely valuable for the content and information that FOMA was able to share through issues of the *Gooney Gazette II*, FOMA's newsletter.

Three of our Board Members participated in a 3-day USFWS Friend's workshop hosted on the island of Hawai'i in January 2017 that convened members from all the Hawaiian Islands Refuge Friends organizations.

All of our Board Members helped to support Refuge staff and other USFWS employees as they worked with the US Navy to design and coordinate events both on the Refuge and across the nation to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Battle of Midway (BOM). Through the donations of our membership and Board Members, FOMA provided first-class tickets to the two BOM and WWII veterans and their daughters to attend the 75th BOM ceremony on Midway Atoll. FOMA also provided gift bags to all BOM veterans and family members on Midway Atoll and at US Navy-sponsored events on the islands of O'ahu and Hawai'i, in San Diego, California, and Washington, D.C.

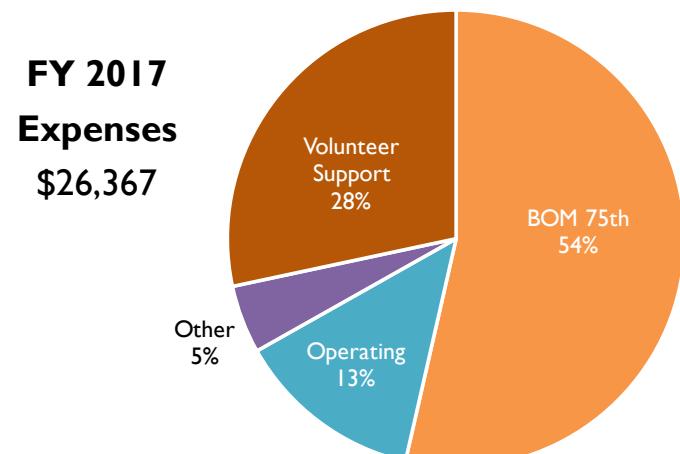
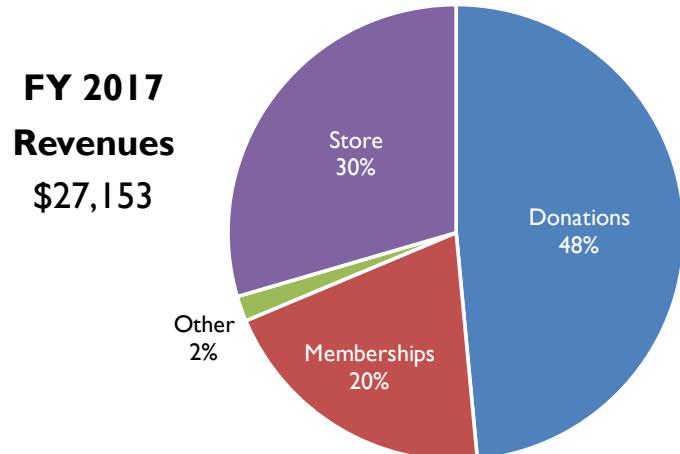
We had 4 FOMA Board Members out on Midway Atoll during the ceremony, helping to give tours and attend to the VIP guests. Former Refuge Manager and FOMA Board Member Dr. Rob Shallenberger gave a keynote address at the FOMA-sponsored 75th BOM reception on the Refuge for attendees and island residents.

FOMA also provided over \$7,500 in support of volunteers on the Refuge. These funds helped pay for meals for the entire annual albatross counter team and for one Kupu (AmeriCorps) intern for her entire year on the Refuge. In FY 2017, FOMA provided over \$22,000 in support of Refuge activities. During our 18 years of existence as a Friends organization, we have generated more than \$500,000 of support (through donations, memberships, gift store sales, and grants) for wildlife conservation and historical preservation related efforts.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our volunteers, FOMA members, USFWS Midway Atoll NWR employees and volunteers, and all of our supporters and followers. Without you, none of our efforts would be successful. As we get closer to our 20th anniversary, we see the cumulative impact of collaboration and support from a community of concerned FOMA members and a legacy of dedicated Board Members. Harnessing the public's passion for such a special place, we have been able to support conservation and historic stewardship on this Refuge.

As 2017 ends and we begin 2018, we would like to recognize the many years of work in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and dedication to FOMA that Board Member Gary Nielsen has given. We appreciate your advice and contributions over the years. Wietek Holthuijzen has also gone above and beyond over the last year, helping FOMA to move into the modern age with better social media outreach, better ways to manage our constituent base, and overseeing and creating the new and engaging format of the *Gooney Gazette II*. Finally, I would also like to thank Teya Penniman for her gracious and sage support over the last few years as Vice President of the FOMA Board. Her tireless dedication and direction has made sure that FOMA moves solidly forward. This was especially important during the last few years, as we have seen our Board successfully move through transitions in that leadership.

We look forward to connecting with all of you in this coming year. Thank you all for your continued support and interest—*mahalo nui loa!* ☐





# 'UA'U KANI

*Midway's moaning bird*

Nearly two dozen seabird species nest at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. The 'ua'u kani / Wedge-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus pacificus*) is one of the least conspicuous—at least to the casual observer. In the past, Midway Atoll's population of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters (affectionately named “wedgies”) were devastated by habitat conversion and rats. Those that remain live in sandy burrows within small, scattered colonies. Fortunately, the completion of a multi-year rat control program in the late 1990s has already resulted in expanded colonies and increasing population numbers on the Refuge.

Wedgies are best known for their remarkable vocalizations. Their wailing, two-part “song” is produced both on exhalation and inhalation. Often the loud cries of an individual bird (or human) will cause other birds in the colony to erupt in song. The Hawaiian name of this species ('ua'u kani) mimics the natural call. To hear the haunting sounds of wedgies, check out this recording from Dan Lane taken on Kīlauea, Kauai County, Hawai'i: <https://www.xenocanto.org/234995>.

Wedgie pairs are monogamous and typically return to the same nesting burrow each year. After a period of courtship and a short pre-laying exodus, most wedgie pairs will lay their single white egg in early June. Their egg will hatch in late July or early August. Both parents will share in incubation and brooding duties for the next 14-15 weeks, after which they will not be seen on land until they return in March to begin the cycle again.

Wedgies feed at sea on a variety of small fish and squid, captured at or near the ocean surface. When caring for chicks, the pairs will bring the partially digested soup back to their nesting burrow and regurgitate it to their young. ☐



# Lend a Hand

Volunteer Opportunities with FOMA and USFWS



Photo by Jonathan Plissner/USFWS

## BECOME A FOMA VOLUNTEER

FOMA is a volunteer-run non-profit organization. Board Members donate their time and skills to support the Refuge because of their passion for Midway Atoll NWR. The FOMA “office” is located in the hearts and minds of the Board, which means that all donations and grant funds go directly to on-atoll projects or outreach activities about the Refuge. We are always looking for volunteers to help with a variety of tasks.

### General FOMA Volunteer Needs

Volunteer activities will be directed by and in concert with board members. Even a few hours of your time can make a difference. Some possible areas for volunteer assistance and specific activities include:

- Research and summarize military history on Midway Atoll
- Create new materials about FOMA for display at the Refuge
- Design and create education or outreach materials to inform students and the public about Refuge resources and challenges
- Research information and find images for our newsletter, website, blog, and social media
- Assist in marketing FOMA’s online store including developing a marketing plan and better utilizing social media and other communication channels

If you are interested in helping FOMA with any of these tasks, please inquire with us at [FriendsMidway@gmail.com](mailto:FriendsMidway@gmail.com). We look forward to hearing from you!

## BECOME A USFWS VOLUNTEER OR ADVOCATE

- Check out all the opportunities at: <http://www.fws.gov/refugee/Midway Atoll/>. Spend up to 6 months on the atoll as a Refuge Biology Volunteer by helping with seabird monitoring and habitat restoration efforts. Not ready for a 6-month commitment? Apply as an Annual Nesting Albatross counter and spend 3 weeks over the winter time (it's still warm!) to help to count all the albatross across the atoll.
- Not able to volunteer on Midway Atoll NWR? The saying goes that the “pen is mightier than the sword,” so consider advocating for Midway! Talk to your state representatives and senators about supporting the National Wildlife Refuge System (Midway Atoll is one of the +560 National Wildlife Refuges across the nation). With an operations and maintenance backlog of +\$3.5 billion and counting, the Refuge System is vastly underfunded. In fact, more than one third of Refuges across the nation have no onsite staff due to budget cuts. To learn more, visit [www.RefugeAssociation.org](http://www.RefugeAssociation.org).
- Find a Refuge near you! The National Wildlife Refuge System is responsible for managing more than 850 million acres of lands and waters, including 5 marine national monuments. There is at least one National Wildlife Refuge in each state and U.S. territory. About 500 Refuges are open to the public and nearly all offer free entry. Visit [www.fws.gov/refuges/refugelocatormaps/](http://www.fws.gov/refuges/refugelocatormaps/) to find a Refuge near you and discover your place to connect with wildlife or join a Friends group to advocate for your favorite Refuge. ☒

Friends of Midway Atoll invites you to

## THE MIDWAY ONLINE STORE

Your destination for all kinds of Midway gear!



*Even against the greatest of odds,  
there is something in the human spirit...  
that can lift men from certain defeat  
to incredible victory. -Walter Lord*



Check out our online store for a variety of items, such as water bottles, tote bags, t-shirts, posters, and more! Be sure to check back often for new items, such as our new Battle of Midway t-shirt.



Proceeds from FOMA merchandise go toward crucial ecological restoration, education and outreach activities, and historical preservation work on Midway. These items were developed in partnership with Hawai'i artist Caren Loebel-Fried, who generously donated the use of her imagery to help support Midway Atoll NWR/Battle of Midway National Memorial. The new Battle of Midway design was created by Katerina Paleckova, one of the talented Albatross Census counters from 2016-2017.



Your membership supports crucial ecological conservation and historic preservation of Midway Atoll NWR's unique resources.

Join or renew today!



Short-tailed Albatross (*Phoebastria albatrus*); photo by Jonathan Plissner/USFWS

### Friends of Midway Atoll NWR MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please fill out this application and mail (with check) to:

Friends of Midway Atoll NWR  
17 Katrina Lane  
San Anselmo, CA 94960

Or visit our website at <http://www.friendsofmidway.org/membership/>  
and follow the instructions to purchase or renew your membership.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Level:

Address \_\_\_\_\_

WWII Veteran..... **Honorary**

City \_\_\_\_\_

Veteran..... \$20.00

State/Province \_\_\_\_\_

Student..... \$25.00

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Individual..... \$35.00

Country \_\_\_\_\_

Family..... \$50.00

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Contributor..... \$100.00

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Supporter..... \$250.00 or more



- New Membership
- Membership Renewal
- Donation

Donation..... \$\_\_\_\_\_

All contributions are tax deductible.

Please make checks payable to:

FOMA or Friends of Midway Atoll NWR