



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Johnston Island National Wildlife Refuge

717 nautical miles west-southwest of
Honolulu, HI 96850 - 5167
E-mail: Pacific_Reefs@fws.gov
Phone Number: 808-792-9560

Visit the Refuge's Web Site:

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



Overview

Johnston Island National Wildlife Refuge

Johnston Atoll National Wildlife Refuge is located in the central Pacific Ocean, 717 nautical miles west-southwest of Honolulu. The refuge is managed for 14 species of breeding sea birds and 5 species of wintering shorebirds, and for its coral reef and diverse marine organisms, including the threatened [green turtle](#).

The atoll comprises four small islands (696 acres), which constitute the only land area in over 800,000 square miles of ocean. The emergent land associated with this refuge provides critical, rat-free habitat for central Pacific sea bird populations; its coral reef ecosystem is an important marine resource.

The refuge was created by Executive Order 4467 in 1926; there has been a military presence on the atoll since 1934. It served as a refueling point for U.S. aircraft and submarines in World War II and as a base for airlift operations during the Korean War. The U.S. Air Force is the current host management agency and has operational control of the atoll.

The infrastructure has grown to support the workforces necessary for various military missions; approximately 1,300 people live and work at Johnston Atoll. The military mission is almost complete, numerous closure and cleanup issues are being discussed, and the atoll will ultimately be returned to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Getting There . . .

The island is closed to public access.

Wildlife and Habitat

Formation of Johnston Atoll began about 70 million years ago, when submarine volcanic eruptions built up layer upon layer of basaltic lava from the floor of the ocean to its surface. Over millions of years, the island slowly eroded and subsided. As the island sank beneath the surface of

Note:

The refuge is closed to the public.

Recreation & Education Opportunities

Environmental Education

[Learn More >>](#)

Management Activities

Starting in the late 1940s, Johnston Atoll played an important role in the United States' nuclear testing program. From the late 1950s to 1962, high-altitude nuclear testing was carried out at Johnston Atoll. Chemical munitions were also stockpiled on Johnston and subsequently incinerated in the Johnston Atoll Chemical Agent Disposal System, built in 1990 and disassembled in 2004 after completion of its mission. By May 2005, almost all of Johnston Island's infrastructure had been removed, and all personnel left the atoll, including refuge staff.

Today, Johnston Atoll remains under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Air Force. Refuge staff occasionally visit the atoll to monitor the status of its wildlife. While previously most of the seabirds and shorebirds were found on Sand, Akua (North), and Hikina (East) islands, they have now colonized Johnston Island, taking advantage of the trees and shrubs left behind by its former human residents. The refuge is managed primarily as a breeding ground for seabirds and a wintering grounds for shorebirds. Twelve species of seabirds, such as the great frigatebird and wedge-tailed shearwater, breed within the atoll. Also

the ocean, corals around its fringes continued to grow.

[Learn More>>](#)

History

This atoll was discovered accidentally in 1796 by Captain Joseph Pierpoint when his ship, the American brig Sally, ran aground. However, it was not until 1807 when the crew of the frigate HMS Cornwallis sighted the atoll and named the larger island after that ship's captain, Charles J. Johnston.

[Learn More>>](#)

common are hosts of petrels, boobies, and noddies. The reef community in the lagoon supports diverse marine life including the threatened green sea turtle and endangered Hawaiian monk seal. The staff manages year-round monitoring programs for 14 species of seabirds and 5 species of migratory shorebirds.

Several significant contaminant issues exist: closure of the chemical weapons disposal plant; dioxin (Agent Orange), which contaminates at least four acres of land and has migrated to the marine environment; plutonium from two abortive missile launches during high-altitude nuclear and missile testing in the 1950s and 1960s; and a subsurface plume of PCB-contaminated petroleum product.

Contaminants tracking involves monitoring seabirds, fishes, and marine invertebrates. Refuge personnel also monitor fish populations and threatened green sea turtles, which use the waters of Johnston Atoll as an important foraging location. Also, soil and sediment samples are used to establish the degree and extent of contamination.

[U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Home Page](#) | [Department of the Interior](#) | [USA.gov](#) | [About the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) | [Accessibility](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Notices](#) | [Disclaimer](#) | [FOIA](#)