



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## Johnston Island National Wildlife Refuge

717 nautical miles west-southwest of  
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Visit the Refuge's Web Site:

<http://pacificislands.fws.gov/wnwr/pjohnsnwr.html>



### 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 sea 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.

### Alert !

The refuge is closed to the public.

### Recreation & Education Opportunities

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### Management Activities

The U.S. Air Force is the current host management agency with ultimate operational control of the atoll. The Department of Defense manages the infrastructure and military mission on Johnston Island, while the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages natural resources on all four islands and the surrounding coral reef.

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 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

## 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 the ocean, corals around its fringes continued to grow.

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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.