

BAKER ISLAND



Photo: Space Imaging

KEY SPECIES

Birds

Red-tailed tropicbirds
Masked boobies
Brown boobies
Red-footed boobies
Great frigatebirds
Lesser frigatebirds
Gray-backed terns
Sooty terns
Brown noddies
Blue noddies
White terns

Reptiles

Green sea turtles
(threatened)
Hawksbill sea turtles
(endangered)

Invertebrates

87 species of stony corals over 33 genera
5 species of benthic cnidarians over 5 genera
12 species of macro-invertebrates other than cnidarians

Fish

311 species in 46 taxonomic families
Gray reef sharks
Black-tip reef sharks
White-tip reef sharks



Underside of table coral and soldierfish

Photo: J E Maragos

PROPOSAL

- Establish a National Monument that includes Baker Island and its surrounding waters
- Expand US Fish and Wildlife Service management authority from 3 to 12 nautical miles (nm)
- Manage the island and nearshore waters to 12 nm as a fully protected National Wildlife Refuge under authority of the Secretary of the Interior
- Establish appropriate conservation measures to protect and conserve the wildlife in the waters and on the seafloor surrounding the fully protected refuge, in particular shallow and deepwater corals, large predatory fishes, and seabirds. This zone from 12 to 200 nautical miles would be managed by the Secretary of Commerce acting through NOAA

IMPORTANCE

- Located on the equator, Baker Island is an important global climate change research and monitoring site
- Localized upwelling by the Equatorial Undercurrent on the western flanks of the island enrich nearshore waters and provide nesting seabirds food
- Eradication of rats by the FWS led to the revival of nesting seabirds, which now include 11 seabird species and almost one million pairs of sooty terns
- Baker Island (along with Howland Island and Jarvis Island) is one of the few known areas where lesser frigatebirds nest on the ground, rather than in trees
- Strong cultural value for the early history of Polynesians and Micronesians
- Exploited for guano and phosphate rock deposits in the mid to late 19th century
- During WWII, Baker Island was occupied by American troops and a US military airstrip was built in 1943 in an effort to combat Japanese forces

SITE DESCRIPTION

Baker Island encompasses approximately 426 acres of emergent reef and land and nearly 32,000 acres of submerged lands. Baker Island and surrounding waters out to 3 nautical miles are currently managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of the Pacific Remote Island Area Refuge Complex. The refuge is currently closed to all uses.

Baker Island is home to a wide variety of terrestrial and marine species, many of which are threatened or endangered. Baker Island is also known for the high diversity and density of fish species in the waters surrounding the island.

THREATS

- Localized upwelling around the island attracts illegal foreign commercial fishermen and shark finners
- Potential shipwrecks, groundings, and oil spills from commercial fishing vessels in refuge waters
- Potential for transiting vessels to ground due to poor charts
- Invasive marine species destroying natural ecology