

JOHNSTON ISLAND



Photo: NOAA

KEY SPECIES

Birds

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

Reptiles

Green sea turtles
(threatened)

Mammals

Hawaiian monk seals
(endangered)
Humpback whales
(endangered)
Cuvier's beaked whales
Spinner dolphins
Pacific bottlenose dolphins

Invertebrates

34 species of
Hydrozoan and
Scleractinian corals

Fish

Over 300 fish species
Gray reef sharks
Tiger sharks



Great Frigatebird

Photo: J E Maragos

PROPOSAL

- Establish a National Monument that includes Johnston Island and its surrounding waters
- Expand US Fish and Wildlife Service management authority 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

- Important source of coral, fish, and gastropod larvae that flow between the Papa-hānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and neighboring reefs and islands in the Line Islands
- Only stepping stone between Hawaii and the Line Islands for the dispersal of marine mammals, shorebirds, sea turtles and other fish and wildlife
- Refuge for resident and migratory fish and seabirds, especially after military abandonment of the island in 2005
- Strategic air station in WWII and during Korean War
- Exploited for guano deposits in late 19th century
- Former US nuclear weapons test site and a missile launch site for some of the first spy satellites

SITE DESCRIPTION

Johnston Atoll comprises two natural islands (Johnston and Sand Islands) and two human-made islands of dredged coral (North and East Islands). The marine environment consists of a shallow coral reef platform encompassing roughly 50 square miles. The surrounding waters are home to a variety of marine mammals, marine reptiles, coral species, cartilaginous fish, marine invertebrates and algae. Approximately 200 threatened green sea turtles are known to utilize the shores of Johnston Island for feeding and the threatened Hawaiian monk seals have been seen foraging in nearby waters and hauling out on the shore.

Johnston Island is currently under the control of the US Air Force, which has ceased all operations on the island. Measures to transfer ownership to the US Fish and Wildlife Service are currently underway. Prior to Air Force use, Johnston Island was designated as a federal bird refuge in 1926. Waters surrounding Johnston Island up to 3 nautical miles are designated as a Naval Defensive Sea under the Department of Defense.

THREATS

- Potential trespass by a handful of US fishing vessels, which cannot be monitored
- Potential shipwrecks, groundings, and oil spills from commercial fishing vessels in refuge waters
- Potential for transiting vessels to ground due to poor charts
- Lost fish aggregating devices (FADs) wash up on reefs and beaches as marine debris and entangle and kill wildlife; potential groundings by trespassing vessels retrieving FADs