

# WAKE ISLAND



Wake Atoll

Photo: DOD

## KEY SPECIES

### Birds

White-tailed tropicbirds  
Red-tailed tropicbirds  
Masked boobies  
Brown boobies  
Red-footed boobies  
Great frigatebirds  
Sooty terns  
Gray-backed terns  
Brown noddies  
Black noddies  
White terns  
Christmas shearwaters  
Turnstones  
Bristle-thighed curlews  
Wandering tattlers  
Lesser golden plovers  
Greater yellowlegs  
Black-footed albatross  
Wake rail (extinct)

### Reptiles

Green sea turtles  
(threatened)

### Invertebrates

52 corals species over  
24 taxonomic genera

### Fish

323 species in 63  
taxonomic families

### Mammals

Spinner dolphins

## PROPOSAL

- Establish a National Monument in Wake Island's surrounding waters
- Manage the nearshore waters to 12 nm as a fully protected National Wildlife Refuge under the authority of the Secretary of the Interior with necessary and appropriate use by the Department of Defense (DOD) for Wake operations
- 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

- Historically important to the Northern Marshall islanders who periodically visited Wake Island to harvest fish and other foods
- Site of significant battle with the Japanese during WWII and the first US territory to fall
- Relatively pristine coral reefs that have not been fished extensively since WWII
- Numerous unexplored seamounts very near to Wake Island
- An endemic rail, *Rallus wakensis*, inhabited the atoll and went extinct during the WWII Japanese occupation. The atoll could provide suitable habitat for the introduction of the Guam rail, a similar species endemic to Guam but now limited to captive propagation
- Identified as an island of significant importance for its capacity to provide habitat to endangered albatross. Currently endangered black-footed and threatened laysan albatrosses inhabit the island
- Abundant populations of Napoleon wrasse, bumphead parrotfish, and large groupers, all of which are depleted elsewhere
- Presence of the rare grass species *Lepturus gasparricensis*

## SITE DESCRIPTION

Wake Island is a small atoll in the central Pacific with a rich array of natural and cultural resources. Wake Island is one of the most isolated—and perhaps oldest living—atolls in the world. It was designated as a National Historical Landmark in 1985.

Wake Island is an unincorporated possession under the Department of Interior's (DOI) authority, but currently used and managed by the DOD. DOD currently restricts access within a 3 nautical mile Naval Defensive Sea. Because DOD restricts access, there has been little fishing pressure, and marine biomass and biodiversity is likely to be extremely high.

## THREATS

- Nearby reefs and seas may be exposed to unauthorized fishing due to insufficient enforcement by federal wildlife personnel
- Unregulated fishing by residents of Wake Island for the bumphead parrotfish and Napoleon wrasse, two extremely vulnerable species
- Potential contamination from old World War II steel dump. Continued presence of algal mats point to an increase in levels of iron in the water
- Illegal presence of shark-finers is suspected due to an unusual absence of gray reef sharks as noted by scientists



Napoleon wrasse Photo: Melbourne Aquarium