

Ma ke kua

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HPA Team Journeys to Midway Atoll To Help with Turtle Study

Above: Students check out a giant replica of Midway's famous gooney birds.

Five students and Assistant Headmaster Marc Rice flew to Midway Atoll in October to assist the National Marine Fisheries Service with their studies of sea turtles at this remote site. Participants were Kalia Goo, Katie Harrington, Josh Johansen, Kenny Shimo, and Candace Sullivan.

George Balazs, leader of the NMFS Honolulu Laboratory's Marine Turtle Research Program, led the study. Midway, 1,100 miles northwest of Honolulu, was the site of a decisive naval battle at the beginning of WW II. It is now a National Wildlife Refuge/Eco-tourism venue managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The green turtle population of the atoll has not been monitored formally for 18 years. The HPA crew was along to assist Balazs and research associate Shawn Murakawa in capturing, tagging, measuring, weighing, health screening, and taking blood samples from as many green turtles as possible. The team made its first SCUBA dive inside the main harbor. The water was murky and they found and captured only one turtle during the dive. Still, several turtles had been seen traveling out of the harbor to feeding grounds in the lagoon outside. Earlier, turtles had been spotted traveling along the breakwater

and Rice made the first net capture of a Midway turtle using a scoop net. The team subsequently captured eight turtles at this site, some by scoop net and some by throw net.

During the next four days, students dove around cargo piers and near feeding grounds to capture a total of 24 green turtles. They also traveled to nearby Spit and Eastern islands where they captured two more turtles. All of the turtles appeared healthy and free of fibropapilloma tumors. One was observed to have tumors in the eye and neck region but could not be captured.

In addition to their turtle work, students

learned about the history of Midway, observed the atoll's wildlife, and enjoyed the beautiful scenery of both Sand and Eastern Island. Several students learned how to handle motorboats and a bit of seamanship.

The days were long and strenuous, but the students worked right up to the last day and Balazs expressed exceptional praise for the students' motivation, endurance, and good cheer and for the research results obtained. Future trips are possible and plans are being made for more HPA students to assist on a follow-up expedition to this unique atoll.

Breaking New Ground:
Students and faculty assembled following the fall convocation for the dedication and blessing of the site where the school will build a Technology Center, lecture hall, IES classroom, and Faculty Development Center.

