

Life at the edge of Hawaii's oldest and most verdant island gives the Moriarty family some of nature's best. Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge is . . .

# A Haven for the Wild

**D**an Moriarty stands on the edge of a cliff at Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge on the island of Kauai and points to a speck soaring out to sea. "There goes a red-tailed tropicbird," he says, without so much as a squint.

Moriarty, 48, has been looking out from these cliffs since he started his job as ranger for the National Fish and Wildlife Service some 10 years ago. The horticulturist, wildlife enthusiast and father of three still gets excited when he spots a sea turtle, a school of dolphin, or a fledgling testing its wings for the first time.

"After work I often come here just to watch," grins Moriarty, wind whipping through his hair. "Or when I'm waiting for someone to arrive at Princeville Airport [on Aloha IslandAir], I'll stand here until I hear the plane, then I'll jump into the car and go pick them up." The ranger's home is located on the grounds of the refuge, not far from land's end.

"People who know wildlife at all know this is the spot to come to," he contends.

The main attractions at Kilauea Point, however, are not the colonies of wedge-tailed shearwaters or red-footed boobies. It is the Kilauea lighthouse standing a few hundred feet downhill

from Moriarty's house that first captures the attention of most visitors.

Built in 1913 when light was still a primary means of navigation for sailing and merchant ships, the red-and-white "beacon station" rises dramatically over the Pacific on the edge of a 200-foot sheer rock dropoff. The drama increases on winter days when huge waves throw up an eerie mist to shroud the structure.

For years Kilauea lighthouse was registered by the United States Coast Guard as a "class B 200-watt beacon

station" and was manned round-the-clock. In 1974 an automated lighting system was installed and the use of a backup light virtually eliminated the need for a full-time lighthouse keeper. The lighthouse was deactivated in 1976 when a fully automatic electronic beacon was placed on a small pylon just seaward of the lighthouse tower.

During the transition, the government decided that the United States Fish and Wildlife Service would be the best agency to serve as custodian of the 31-acre site, which contains a large and varied group of wildlife species. After a number of years, during which the Coast Guard continued to maintain the lighthouse, the title of the area was finally changed in 1985 to Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge.

Today the sturdy pharos serves as an automated weather station, feeding information regularly to air traffic controllers at Honolulu International Airport. Last year, Kilauea Point had one of the highest visitor traffic flows of any Wildlife Refuge in the United States. At the height of the tourist season, 1,500 people might stop by to see it in a single day.

"Information gathered here is real important," notes Moriarty. "This is the northernmost point in the entire island chain. All the weather starts here," he says, pointing north. Just offshore is the tiny island, Mokuaeae, literally translated as "fragment frothing in the rising tide."

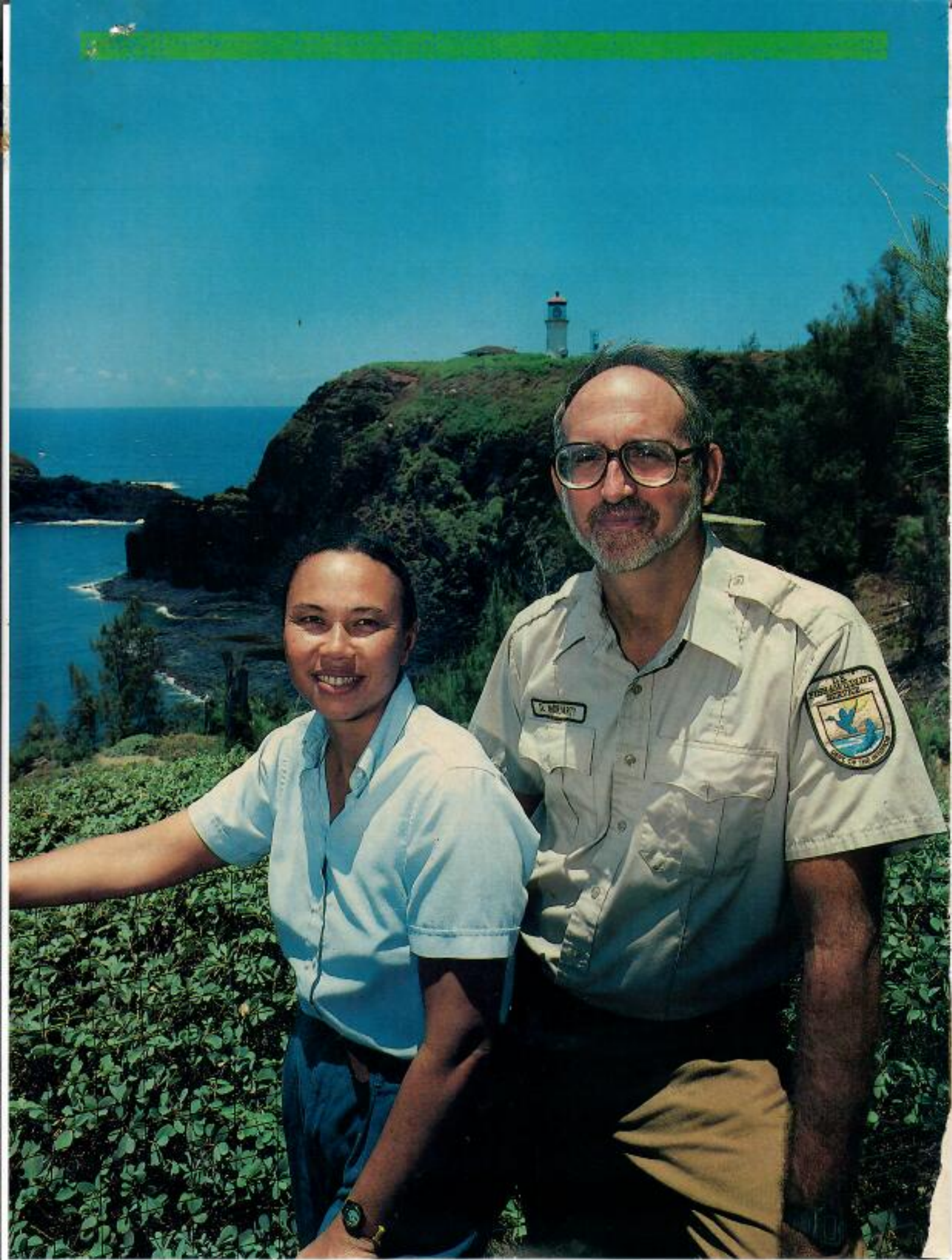
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"People who know wildlife at all know this is the spot to come to."

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By Sue Lanci

*Linda and Dan Moriarty share the wonders of Kauai's Kilauea sanctuary. Photo by Keith Karasic.*





*A young albatross struts his stuff.*

Kilauea Lighthouse was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 and celebrated its 75th birthday this year amid a flurry of fanfare and nostalgia. Local residents, former lighthouse keepers and visitors all joined in the celebration. A commemorative book on the historic landmark is now available at the Refuge visitors center.

"We actually found a former lighthouse keeper who is 91 years old when we were writing this book," notes Moriarty. "His nephew came through here one day and told me about him. I couldn't believe he was still alive and living in San Diego. His whole family used to live here."

Although much has changed since the days when the solid white tower guided ships to safety and small airplanes to land, life at Kilauea Point remains much the same. The wind still gusts at night, seabirds still come to nest and a man still tends the rustic peninsula that his family makes a home. Dan Moriarty shares the refuge's ranger house with his wife Linda and their three children—Mary, 13, Ann, 9 and Donald, 6.

"We really enjoy it here," says Linda. "But it's not like Oahu where you can go out to a restaurant to eat. Dan comes home for lunch every day. And when someone comes and visits, they'll have lunch at our house. So lunch is kind of a big time for us."

Linda, a native of Kauai, met Dan in 1965 while both were attending school at the University of Hawaii. The author of the book *Niihau Shell Leis*, Linda is also Kauai's chief wholesaler of imported crafts from the South Pacific.

"I deal primarily with handicrafts like woven baskets, floor mats, tapas," explains Linda. "For many years I've supplied all the museum shops in Hawaii, bringing in items from places like Fiji and Samoa, the Marshalls, Micronesia and the Solomon Islands."

The couple recently returned from a six-week business trip to Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand and Malaysia. Although they love to travel, both are happy to be back to the quiet comfort of their island home.

While content with their slow-paced lifestyle, the Moriartys nonetheless recognize that theirs is not a typical Hawaiian home. It's an unusual existence for the 1980s, acknowledges Dan, especially for the children.

"Like anything else it's got its good features and its bad," he says. "Sure,

it's beautiful, but you have to realize that there aren't many kids to play with here. When the kids were young it was OK but you reach a certain point in time when they start to break out and want their peers.

"And with our children getting older," he continues, "education be-

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comes important to us." The remoteness of their home forced a major change in the couple's lifestyle this year when Mary Moriarty started attending school at Oahu's prestigious Punahou School. She and Linda stay in a rented apartment there Monday through Friday and commute home on the weekends. Dan stays home with the two younger children, who attend elementary school.

Home, for the entire Moriarty family, is a place where everyday life reads like the pages of National Geographic. Part of its uniqueness stems from Dan's job responsibilities. "I help Dan and the kids do some of the wildlife work," notes Linda.

Dan explains: "What happens is this; young birds (wedge-tailed shearwaters) nest up in the mountains and when they leave their nests and try to fly out to sea, they get attracted to lights and come down. The people on the island are aware of this so they pick them up and bring them to fire stations. I'll go out and collect the birds from the different stations and the kids will help release them. We recover and band about 1,500 birds a

year. It's a joint state-federal project."

Such experiences have bred into the Moriarty brood an almost instinctual love of nature. None of the children have a desire to pursue their father's field, Dan confesses, although they all actually know more about wildlife than most adults.

The longer you talk with Dan Moriarty the clearer it is that the ranger doesn't merely enjoy his work; he lives it. A visit to the refuge's albatross nesting grounds confirms the observa-

tion. As Dan enters the protected area, he spins off a steady stream of facts about the birds, their habits, the continual effort to protect them from predators, and what fun it is to watch them learn to fly.

"This is their runway here," he says, pointing to a strip of grass atop a small hill. "They run into the wind and don't always make it. It's hysterical to watch," he says, chuckling.

"And look at some of them," he adds. "They look like little rock stars."

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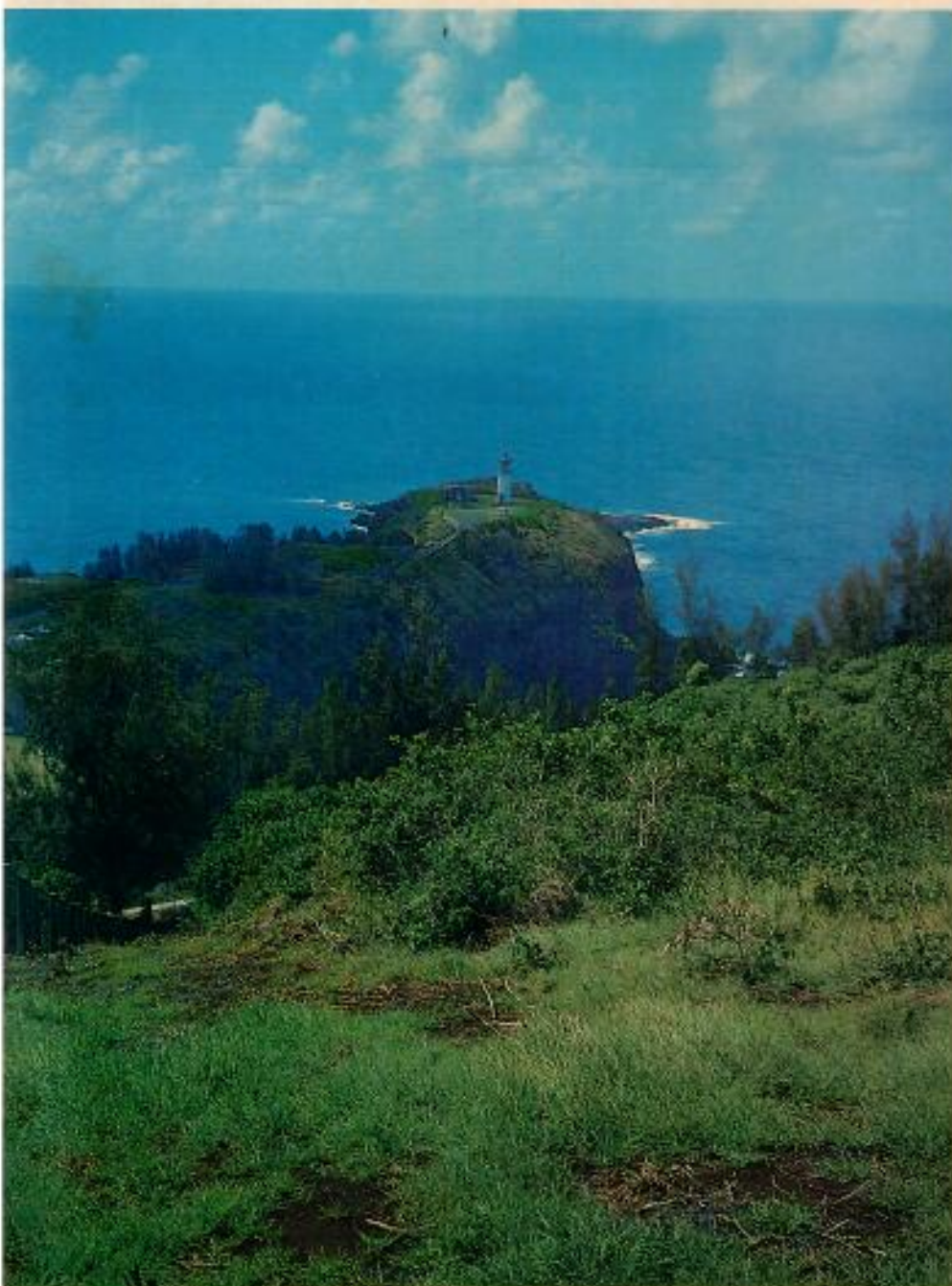
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"This is the northernmost point in the entire island chain. All the weather starts here."



*Kilauea Lighthouse marks Kauai's northernmost point.* Photo by Sue Lancl.

A fledgling struts by sporting a mohawk-like hairdo, which according to Dan will fall out as the bird nears adulthood. All the young albatross are extremely vulnerable to neighboring predators. "Most people don't realize how much protection we provide the wildlife here," he says.

Mending fences, setting traps, landscaping and maintaining grounds is tiresome work. But seen through the eyes of child—or adults like Linda and Dan Moriarty—the work provides a chance to stay close to the land. Given their priorities, it's not surprising that the Moriarty household has no television.

"The kids don't really miss it," Linda contends. "Although, I must admit, whenever we go to someone's house who has a TV, they run right to it."

TV or no TV, it's a sure bet the Moriartys will be around for some time. Linda's family lives "right down the road" and Dan bubbles with enthusiasm over an upcoming expansion of the refuge. He still can't understand why the story hasn't made headlines.

The Kilauea Point refuge recently acquired a total of 134 acres of ocean-front land adjacent to its existing 33 acres. The new expanse, which includes a 568-foot cliff known as Crater Hill, will be used as a hiking ground. When the trails are complete, says Moriarty, Kilauea Point will offer some of the most spectacular views in the state.

The additional land was acquired through the efforts of a local community group known as the Crater Hill Coalition with the help of the Trust for Public Land, U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye, U.S. Reps. Daniel Akaka and Pat Saiki. In the end, the state bought 38 acres to add to the refuge and 96 acres were donated by the Pali Moana Corp., a Kauai developer.

A new visitors center will be built to handle the expected increase in traffic and to provide more room for the 126 docents who assist with everything from visitor education and wildlife interpretation to bookstore management, nursery and plant propagation work, seabird banding and nest monitoring activities.

It's been a long time since Kilauea Lighthouse flashed its warning light over the crags of northern Kauai, but for residents and visitors alike, the charm of the rugged peninsula that supports it is as timeless as the surf that pounds at its feet.