



**NOAA Teacher at Sea
Christopher Monsour
Onboard NOAA Ship OSCAR ELTON SETTE
June 12 – July 12, 2007**

NOAA Teacher at Sea: Chris Monsour
NOAA Ship OSCAR ELTON SETTE
Mission: Lobster Survey Western Hawaiian Islands
Day 20 July 3rd, 2007

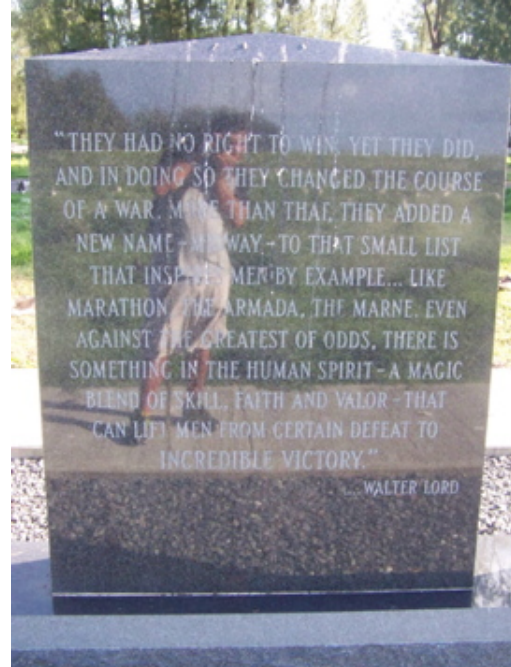
Log #9

I have decided to just combine the logs because we have not had a chance to do any lobster trapping in the past seven days and really have not done a lot of science. I have seen a lot science and ecology in action, but I have not participated in doing any research, so no science log today.

Last night at about 1:00 a.m., I watched as the air ambulance took off from Midway. I had the chance to ride in the ambulance to the airstrip and help with the final transport of the injured researcher. Watching the plane take off was the culmination of my unexpected visit to Midway Atoll. I must say, that I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to visit Midway and take in some of the history and nature of the island. I spent the two days here relaxing on the beach, observing several thousand Laysan albatross, and just exploring a remarkable island. So this log will focus on Midway. Most the information comes from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Multi-Agency Education project.

Midway Atoll is a circular-shaped atoll with three small islets (Sand, Eastern, and Spit) on the southern end of the lagoon. Midway is probably the best known location within the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. While the land area only covers about 1535 acres, the atoll has approximately 85,929 acres of reef.

During World War II, Midway served as an important naval air station and submarine refit base. The atoll was attacked twice, first on December 7th 1941, and again during the pivotal Battle of Midway, June 4th-6th 1942. A successful American intelligence operation tipped the U.S. forces to the planned attack, and a small U.S. task force was able to surprise and



The reflection of NOAA Teacher at Sea Chris Monsour can be seen in one of the monuments to The Battle of Midway.

defeat the Japanese invasion fleet bound for the atoll. Many interpret this battle as the watershed moment in the tide of the Pacific War. Though the major carrier-based actions took place to the north, a fierce air battle was waged above and on Sand and Eastern Islands. The atoll was designated as the National Memorial to the Battle of Midway in 2000.

Nearly two million birds of 19 species nest at Midway. The atoll has the largest Laysan albatross (also called goonie birds) colony in the world. Other birds include black-footed albatross, red-tailed tropicbirds, white terns, black and brown noddies, shearwaters, and Bonin petrels.

The waters abound with dolphins, monk seals, and green sea turtles. More than 250 species of fish live in its waters, including hapu`upu`u, ulua (jack), kumu (goatfish), and sharks. Beyond the reefs are pelagic fishes such as tuna and marlin.



NOAA Teacher at Sea Chris Monsour captured a Fairy Tern displaying its wings during his trip to Midway Atoll.

In 1996 the once strategic naval base was turned over to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to be managed as Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. A massive U.S. Navy clean up prior to their departure removed tons of debris, leaky fuel tanks, and lead paint, as well as rats. Today a fulltime Refuge staff administers a small visitor program, cares for its wildlife, restores native plant life, and protects historic resources.



Teacher at Sea Chris Monsour captured this photo of several Laysan Albatross resting in one of the fields on Sand Island at Midway Atoll.

It would be hard to not mention the Laysan Albatross when not mentioning Midway. Over seventy percent of the world's population nests at Midway. In 1996, about 387,854 breeding pairs of Laysan Albatross nested on all three

islands of Midway Atoll. When I asked the Fish and Wildlife about the number of

Albatross currently on the island, he stated around 400,000 breeding pairs. We just happened to be at Midway when the chicks were beginning to fledge. To get around on the island was at times difficult because the birds would not move when approached. At times the streets were full of adults and chicks and one had to zigzag through the sea of birds. As one passes by an albatross and gets to close, it will snap. It was nothing for me to be walking to the North Beach and have a hundred of these birds snapping at me. I have never seen the Alfred Hitchcock movie "The Birds", but it was referenced several times as we made our way through the island. It was especially eerie at night because it gets very dark on

Midway and I forgot to bring a flashlight with me on the second night. I walked along the beach back to the ship because I knew if I followed the roads back, I might step on an albatross.

Overall, I enjoyed the time at Midway Atoll. We are currently on course back to Necker Island. We'll have four more days of trapping, and then we'll depart for Pearl Harbor.

Aloha...
Chris



NOAA Ship OSCAR ELTON SETTE seems to be dwarfed by one of the huge fuel tanks on Sand Island at Midway Atoll.