



NOAA Teacher at Sea
Kazu Kauinana
Onboard NOAA Ship OSCAR ELTON SETTE
May 8 – May 23, 2006

Mission: Fisheries Survey
Day 3: Thursday, May 11, 2006

Latitude: 24, 01.0 N
Longitude: 167, 10.3
Visibility: 10 NM
Wind direction: 090
Wind speed: 20 KTS
Sea wave heights: 4-6
Seawater temperature: 24.8 C
Sea level pressure 1818
Cloud cover: 2/8 cumulus, altocumulus

I did not get a good night's sleep last night so I woke up at 6:30 a.m. instead of my usual 4:30. I attended an 8:00 a.m. briefing this morning for all those who were scheduled to leave for Tern Island in the French Frigate Shoals. I departed early at 9:00 AM in a Zodiac with two crewmen who were delivering cargo to the island. You could see the island in the distance when we started out but we encountered a squall and lost visibility of everything. The pilot was familiar with the reefs and the island, and when the rain cleared, we were still on the right path.

As we approached Tern Island the thousands of birds that inhabit the World War II landing strip became increasingly clearer and the raucous squawking grew louder and louder until it was almost deafening. It was HITCHCOKISH! In fact, the bird sounds from Tern Island were used in the movie "The Birds". We were greeted by two women (Most of the volunteers and scientists on this trip, and I think in general, are women) who helped us dock and unload the boat. I spent most of my time on the island at the dock unloading shuttle loads from the OSCAR SETTE.

An airplane was scheduled to arrive so I watched the staff clear the runway of all the baby Albatross from the airstrip. They were about 4 months old, molting, the size of a small turkey, and like the rest of the bird population, fearless of humans. They picked them up and handled them like human babies and carried them off to the side of the runway. Bicycles with handlebar baskets were also used for the ones further down the strip. The plane arrived and the sky became peppered with adult birds. No birds were killed. This is pretty good considering that there are so many birds that you have to be careful not to step on any while walking. The birds do prefer to nest off the hot run way but the chicks wander out there and bask. If you do happen to disturb a nesting bird off of its nest, usually by running or nearly stepping on them, you have to stop and monitor

the nest until the nesting bird returns. This is to prevent other birds from pecking holes in the eggs, killing the chicks or stealing nest-building materials. Sahn tarabo yeah?

I wasn't allowed to leave the pier without a guide so I went back to watch for the next cargo delivery and stared into the crystal clear water. I noticed a fish headed straight for me and as it got larger and larger, I realized that it was a three-foot long ulua. It turned parallel to the edge of the pier, tilted his body at an angle so it could see me better then slowly swam off. It returned two more times and had a good look at me before swimming off to write his friends about what he just saw. I was told later that they are very abundant and that they hang around you when you go snorkeling. They must know that like the rest of the reef fish they cannot be eaten because of sagittaria. From the pier, I also saw two large Green Sea Turtles wrestling or mating. Hard to tell since I couldn't see their genitals.

After about two hours on the pier, a boatload of excited scientists from the SETTE arrived and we were led on a tour of the island. Some of the most interesting facts I found out about Tern island are: their water catchment is a large concrete slab on the ground (too hot for birds nests and not used for drinking); drinking water is reverse osmosis from sea water; 10 people live on Tern; sea lion research is also done on the island (we saw three adult Hawaiian Monk Seals on the beach); when you go swimming go with someone else and look out for the SHARKS.

It's 10:30 p.m., I am exhausted, hele au moe moe.

Malama Pono, Kazu