Johnston Atoll National Wildlife Refuge
Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument
Johnston Island National Wildlife Refuge

One of the most isolated atolls in the world, Johnston Island National Wildlife Refuge sits on a submerged coral platform more than 32,000 acres in size and less than 100 feet deep. A portion of the atoll has been a National Wildlife Refuge since 1926.

Once home of a U.S. Navy seaplane base, air station, nuclear testing site, chemical munitions storage facility, and the Johnston Atoll Chemical Agent Disposal System, since June 2004, the atoll has been cleaned and returned to the wildlife that call it home.

The atoll supports a high density of reef formations, including coral gardens, moles, and platforms. Some 42 species of coral have been identified, including at least 10 species of Acropora staghorn corals, six of which may have disappeared from Johnston to French Frigate Shoals and its neighbors to Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

The atoll supports over 200 species of birds and 30 species of land mammals. A number of seabirds on Johnston Island are increasing.

Peppered Moray Eel and Pacific Light Felt Crab
EO 4467, June 29, 1926
by Calvin Coolidge

“...located in the Pacific Ocean approximately in latitude 16° 44’ 45” North and longitude 169° 30’ 30” West from Greenwich, as segregated by the broken line…”

“...hereby reserved and set apart for the use of the Department of Agriculture as a refuge and breeding ground for native birds.”
Johnston Island was originally about 64 acres; it was enlarged in stages by DOD dredge and fill operations to its present size of about 640 acres. Johnston Island served as chemical weapons storage and disposal facility until 2003. Air Force has cleaned and removed infrastructure and contamination as part of termination of mission in accordance with RCRA permit.
Johnston Island 1941
Johnston Island

Photo courtesy of US Government Archives
- An unincorporated U.S. territory located 717 nautical miles southwest of Honolulu
- One of the most isolated atolls in the world, located midway between the Line Islands and the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands
- Nearest landmass is French Frigate Shoals, 450 miles to the northwest
- Only seabird nesting area in 450,000 sq miles of ocean
Fringing Reef and Islands of Johnston Atoll
Islands of Johnston Atoll

Johnston Island (633 acres)

Sand Island (16 acres)

North “Akau” Island (26 acres)

East “Hikina” Island (21 acres)
Johnston Island May 2009
Ant infestation February 2010
Seabirds are moving onto the deserted landscape.
All the buildings (except one and some bunkers) were removed. But the roads, runway, sidewalks, and building concrete pads remain. Leaving a landscape of a ghost town being taken over by seabirds.
Red-footed Boobies
Red-footed booby
Brown Booby
Masked booby
Red-tailed tropicbird
White tern
Acropora Corals
Acropora cerealis coral
Green Turtle

photo: J. Maragos
Peppered moray eel