

## **The Seabird Sanctuary Rescue and Rehabilitation Program at Sea Life Park**

In the heart of the Sea Life Park campus is the Seabird Sanctuary. It may be easy to miss this modest little habitat; however, it is one of the Park's most important programs, dealing with native Hawaiian seabirds.

In this enclosure of about 500 square feet, you will find a place of refuge for injured Hawaiian seabirds that will never be able to return to the wild. Here they can live out the remainder of their lives, well cared for and protected in this sanctuary. The program, the only one of its kind in the state of Hawai'i, is funded entirely by Sea Life Park. The Park is the only facility on Oahu that operates 24 hours a day every day of the year to care for and rehabilitate injured sea birds.

Sea Life Park is authorized to take in only native Hawaiian seabirds. Waterfowl (such as ducks and geese) and land-based birds are not a part of the program, since the care of the seabirds is very specific to their species. Types of birds that are often cared for include terns, shearwaters, albatross, petrels, frigates and boobies. Altogether, there are 22 different species of Hawaiian seabirds.

The population of sheltered birds at Sea Life Park varies, depending on the number of birds brought into the program. At the time of this writing (October, 2011), the Sanctuary housed one masked booby, three brown boobies, five red-footed boobies, ten wedgetail shearwaters, and two great frigates. The frigates, Iwa the male and Lady the female, are very special residents, presiding as the largest birds and preferring to be loners. Iwa has perched on the edge of the Sanctuary in his own special "throne" covered by a bit of canvas, for many years where he oversees the flock in the Sanctuary with one eye and looks out to his former home at sea with the other.

One non-native species has been allowed into the program: a Glaucous-winged gull known as Gulliver that was found injured in Lā'ie. A possible migrant aboard a ship, the little stranger to Hawai'i has been allowed to have a home with the native Hawaiian birds in the Sanctuary.

Birds have been a part of Sea Life Park since its opening in the 1960s. A collection was brought to the Park from Midway (allowable at the time) that included albatrosses, terns and tropic birds. Later, with state permits, a collection of red-footed boobies was brought in from a seabird rookery on O'ahu; and these were hand-raised without clipped wings, flying freely throughout the property and out to sea to fish. When at the Park, they begged fish from the trainers and provided entertainment for the guests.

One of the boobies chose a mate and actually raised a chick, a bit of a zoological triumph. Eventually, a little breeding colony was established at the Park and babies were produced each year. It was discovered that the birds, though free to fly away, returned to the exact

spot where they had first learned to fly in order to nest and breed. Thus, they sought out the very spots in the Park where they first fledged and returned there year after year.

Despite the interesting historical affinity for seabirds that was engendered by these original efforts, Sea Life Park today does not collect or train birds.

Outside of the Park's campus in the parking lot is the Seabird Rehabilitation Center where, each year, hundreds of seabirds are taken in and treated for injury, exhaustion, dehydration or illness. In 2010, over 1000 birds were treated and released. The most impact is felt during the shearwater fledging season in November and December. When these young birds are learning to fly, using the stars and the moon at night for navigation, they often become disoriented by human-generated bright lights and fly until they are exhausted.

Other birds come to the Center with broken wings, cat or dog wounds, fishing line entanglements and fish hooks. When brought to the Rehabilitation Center, they receive rest, water and their seabird diet of smelt, herring and squid. All are treated with the aim of a successful release back into the wild and the hope that they will never need to reside in the Sanctuary. Only white terns are taken to the Sanctuary for a "soft release." This involves weaning them off their feedings over a period of time and gradually encouraging them to fly away, because that is how parent terns wean and fledge their babies.

The birds are released in the large meadow facing the ocean. During the high shearwater fledging season, this occurs three times daily. If the birds don't successfully take off, they are given "flight therapy," a bit of a lesson in how to flap their wings again.

Sea Life Park is the only place where someone may bring an injured seabird 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Even in the middle of the night, concerned bird lovers have placed an injured or sick bird into one of the kennels that is always open at the Rehabilitation Center.

The Sea Life Park Seabird Rehabilitation Center and Sanctuary represent the Park's commitment to caring for native Hawaiian species that make up the unique population sharing our ocean environment.