Membership Newsletter Volume 45 Number 1 – Spring 2021

The Nature Conservancy
Hawai'i and Palmyra

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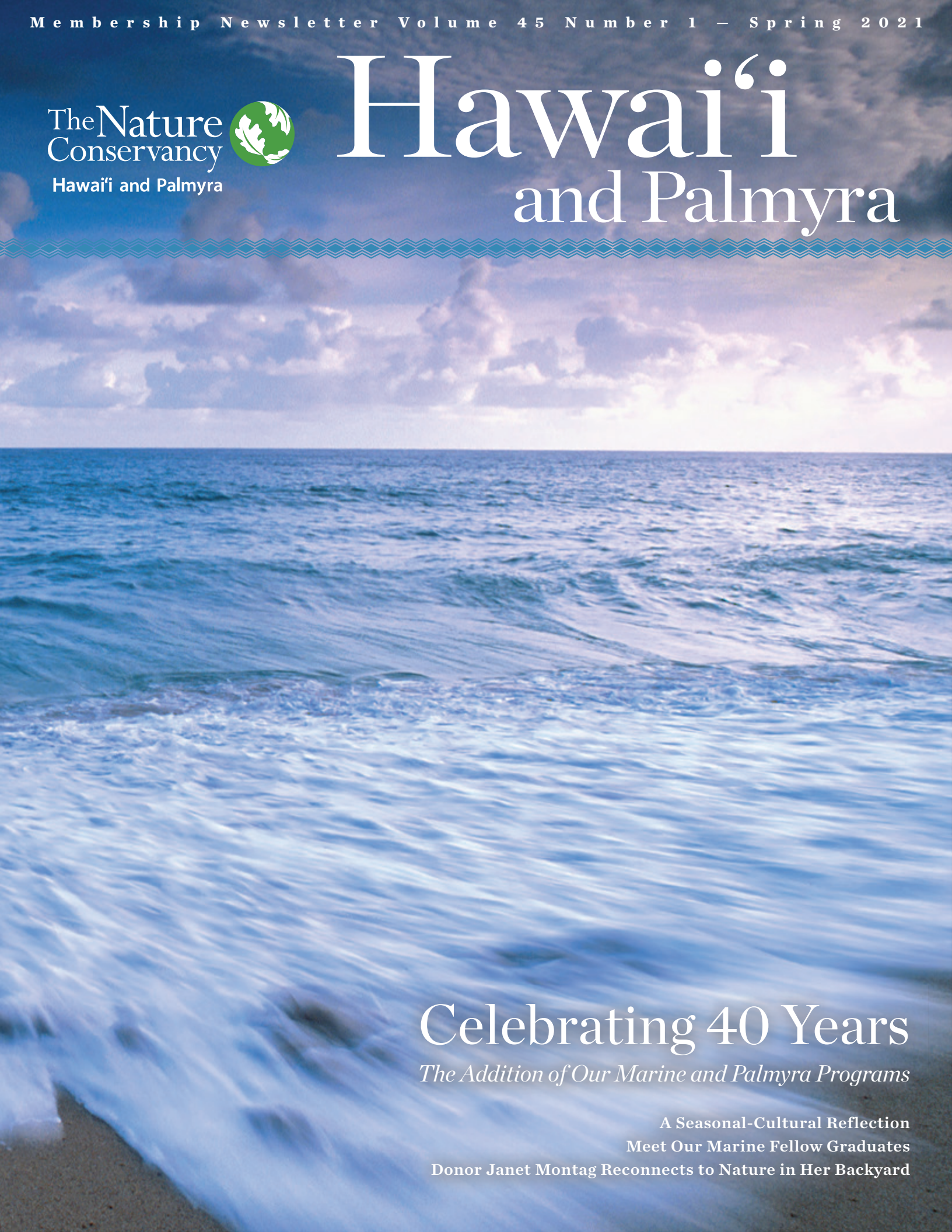

Celebrating 40 Years

The Addition of Our Marine and Palmyra Programs

A Seasonal-Cultural Reflection
Meet Our Marine Fellow Graduates
Donor Janet Montag Reconnects to Nature in Her Backyard

Together, We Thrive

Community members and fishpond practitioners work together to restore the historic rock walls around Kiholo Fishpond. © Nancy Erger

Aloha kākou,

Spring has sprung! In Hawai'i, the transition from Ho'oilo (wet season) to Kauwela (hot or warm dry season) occurs in May, when we start seeing subtle changes in the nature around us. (See story on Page 3 that describes the cultural aspects of our seasons.)

As we are winding up the year commemorating our 40th anniversary, we are happy to share Part Two of our anniversary story. The feature in our last newsletter (Fall 2020) highlighted our beginnings in Hawai'i, focusing on forest and watershed protections. The cover story in this issue continues the journey, highlighting the creation of our Marine Program and acquisition of Palmyra Atoll.

You may notice a small but significant change to the name under our logo on the cover of this newsletter: It now includes both Hawai'i and Palmyra. This new representation recognizes conservation contributions of our chapter beyond the Hawaiian Islands and reflects our commitment to working together as we focus on our priorities to protect lands, oceans and freshwater; tackle climate change; and explore innovative solutions.

In this issue, we are excited to introduce our new Director of External Affairs Anthony Ching. Anthony comes to us after working in the U.S. Capitol as congressional staff to members of the Hawai'i delegation. His expertise will help us advance policy and funding initiatives that support our conservation goals. We also welcome a new member to our Philanthropy Team, Melissa Fisher, and share the work of our latest Marine Fellow graduates.

The COVID-19 pandemic taught us that the health of our environment is directly tied to human and economic health. As we look to the future, biocultural conservation —predicated on reciprocal relationships and the integration of people and nature—will inform how we conserve the natural world and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Our hope and aim for the next 40 years is for our lands, oceans and freshwater to thrive despite the changing climate through adaptation and innovation, merging the best science with traditional ecological knowledge, continuing to bring partners together in collaboration, and connecting people with nature.

One community at a time, one region at a time, we continue to work to inspire people to connect to the foundational places that nourish their lives, economies and livelihoods. And we continue to be thankful to you, our loyal supporters, who join us on this journey.

Mālama a mahalo a nui loa
(take care and thank you very much),

Ulalia Woodside

© Rikki Cooke

The Nature Conservancy
Protecting nature. Preserving life.

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The Nature Conservancy Hawai'i and Palmyra chapter is the local affiliate of The Nature Conservancy, an international, non-profit organization based in Arlington, VA.

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

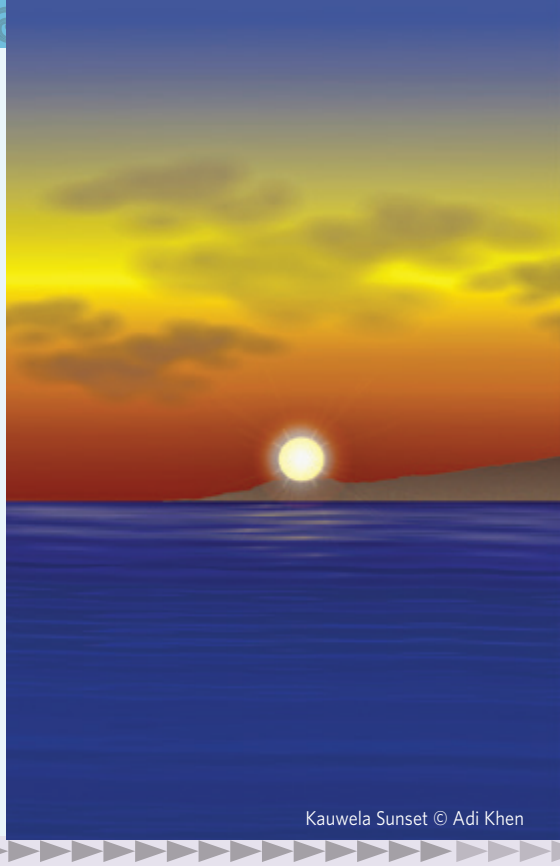
Cover: Oceanscape © John De Mello

Reflections on the Seasons

In Hawai‘i, there are two traditional seasons: The Ho‘oilo that covers the six months of cooler, wetter weather from November to April, and the hotter half of the year, called the Kauwela that runs roughly from May to October. Recognizing that conditions on both land and sea were different during these times, human activities from farming and fishing to oceanic voyaging were prescribed in accordance to what the land and sea dictated.

May 2 on the island of O‘ahu marks the start of the hot Kauwela season, and is marked by the sun setting into the bowl of Pu‘u Kapolei crater as seen from Waikīkī, which was once the center of governance for the island. On land, the ‘ōhi‘a lehua forests come into peak bloom, providing an abundance of nectar to feed our native honeycreepers. On the sea, the high surf of winter subsides and there is less stormy weather in the uplands, enabling our field teams to conduct research and management activities more safely in our forest preserves and watershed partnership lands. At Palmyra Atoll, there are also indications of the change of season: North swells subside, and kioea (bristle-thighed curlews) and kōlea (golden plovers) migrate north.

As it was in ancient Hawai‘i, it is true today: Our work benefits from paying attention to what the seasons on land and sea tell us, and both people and nature benefit when we play close attention to the health of the lands and waters that sustain all life in the islands. – Sam Gon



Kauwela Sunset © Adi Khen

Introducing New Staff

E komo mai! This spring, we welcome Anthony Ching, our new Director of External Affairs. After 11 years in Washington, D.C. working with the current and past Hawai‘i congressional delegations, Anthony returns home to work with The Nature Conservancy.

“We are thrilled to welcome Anthony on board as Director of External Affairs,” says Ulalia Woodside, Executive Director of TNC Hawai‘i and Palmyra. “Transformational outcomes for conservation and climate solutions depend upon catalytic policy changes at all levels. Anthony is uniquely positioned to continue our work as a key partner and lead advocate for public policy and government action.”

In this position, Ching will help further the work of TNC and partners through direct interaction with local, state and federal elected officials, government agencies and others through planning, coordinating, leading and implementing conservation policy and funding initiatives that provide sound conservation opportunities.

“I am very much looking forward to returning home and working to protect Hawai‘i and Palmyra’s precious and unique land, waters and biodiversity,” says Ching. “While there are still many challenges we face due to COVID-19 and its health and economic impacts, I am encouraged by the strength of TNC’s people and expertise to make positive change.”
– Toni Parras

Profile

This March, Rosie Lee and Melissa Mau completed their two-year marine fellowships with TNC and Kāko‘o Ō‘iwi. They spent the first year learning about coastal and community-based conservation—from scientific diving to conservation planning and grant-writing to native ecosystem restoration. Then they put their new skills to work on their capstone projects.

Rosie, a University of Hawai‘i at Hilo graduate, helped community partners in West Hawai‘i develop fisheries management options using new decision support tools developed through Hawai‘i’s first FishPath planning process. Rosie facilitated conversations between community members and managers, and helped write the community’s draft sustainable fisheries management plan.

Melissa earned her degree at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa specifically so she could apply for this fellowship. For her project, Melissa worked with our partners at Kāko‘o ‘Ōiwi and the He‘eia National Estuarine Research Reserve on O‘ahu restoring native wetland habitat. She also developed recommendations for improving communication across partnerships within the ahupua‘a (traditional land subdivision that incorporates elements from mountain to sea).

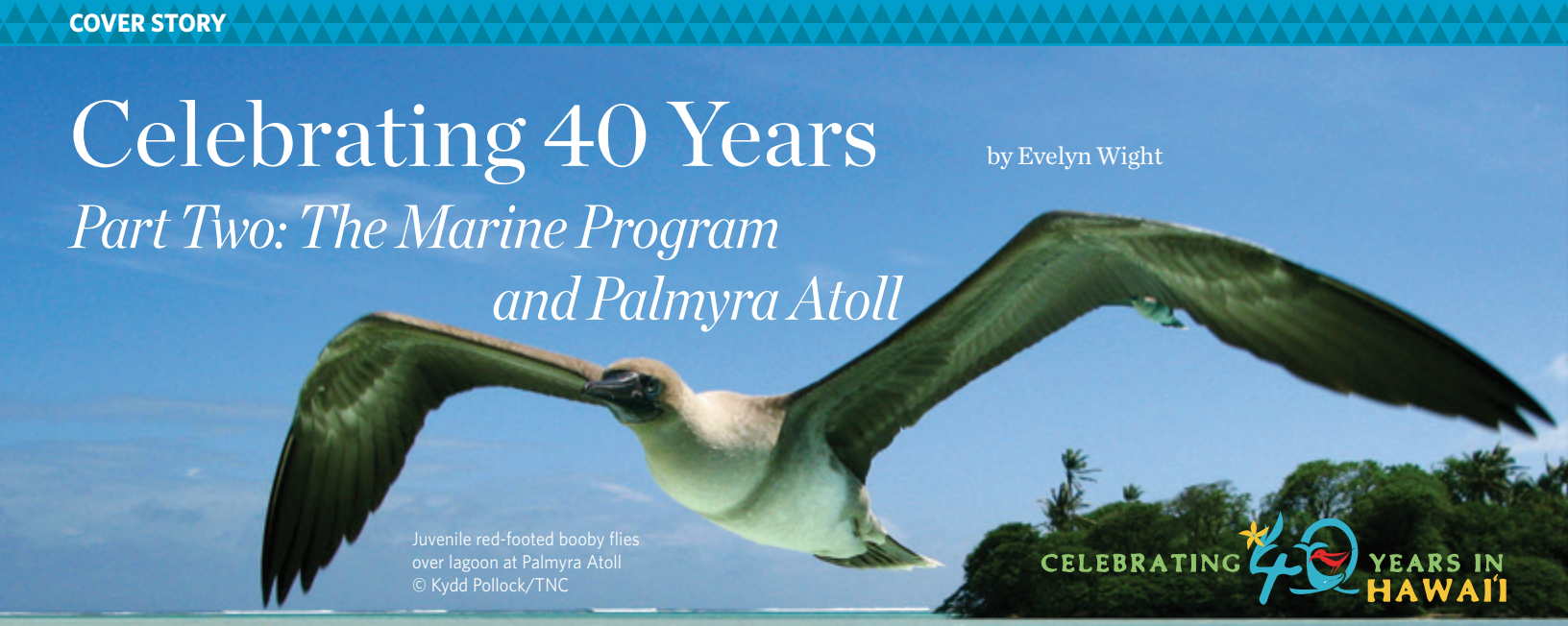
Rosie Lee (left) and Melissa Mau (right). © Sean Marrs/TNC

We wish Rosie and Melissa the best as they move on to their new jobs. Rosie is joining NOAA’s Pacific Island Fisheries Science Center as an Ecosystems Science Division Technician, and Melissa is joining Kāko‘o ‘Ōiwi as a project manager.
– Jessica Glazner

Celebrating 40 Years

Part Two: The Marine Program and Palmyra Atoll

by Evelyn Wight



Juvenile red-footed booby flies over lagoon at Palmyra Atoll
© Kydd Pollock/TNC

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS IN HAWAIʻI

The partnerships we forged across sectors since the 1980s to protect and manage Hawaiʻi's native forests were groundbreaking (see our Fall 2020 Newsletter cover story). Working with government, nonprofits and private landowners, we are actively preserving 2.2 million acres of Hawaiian forests that are home to rare plants, birds and animals found nowhere else on Earth and are the sole source of our islands' freshwater.

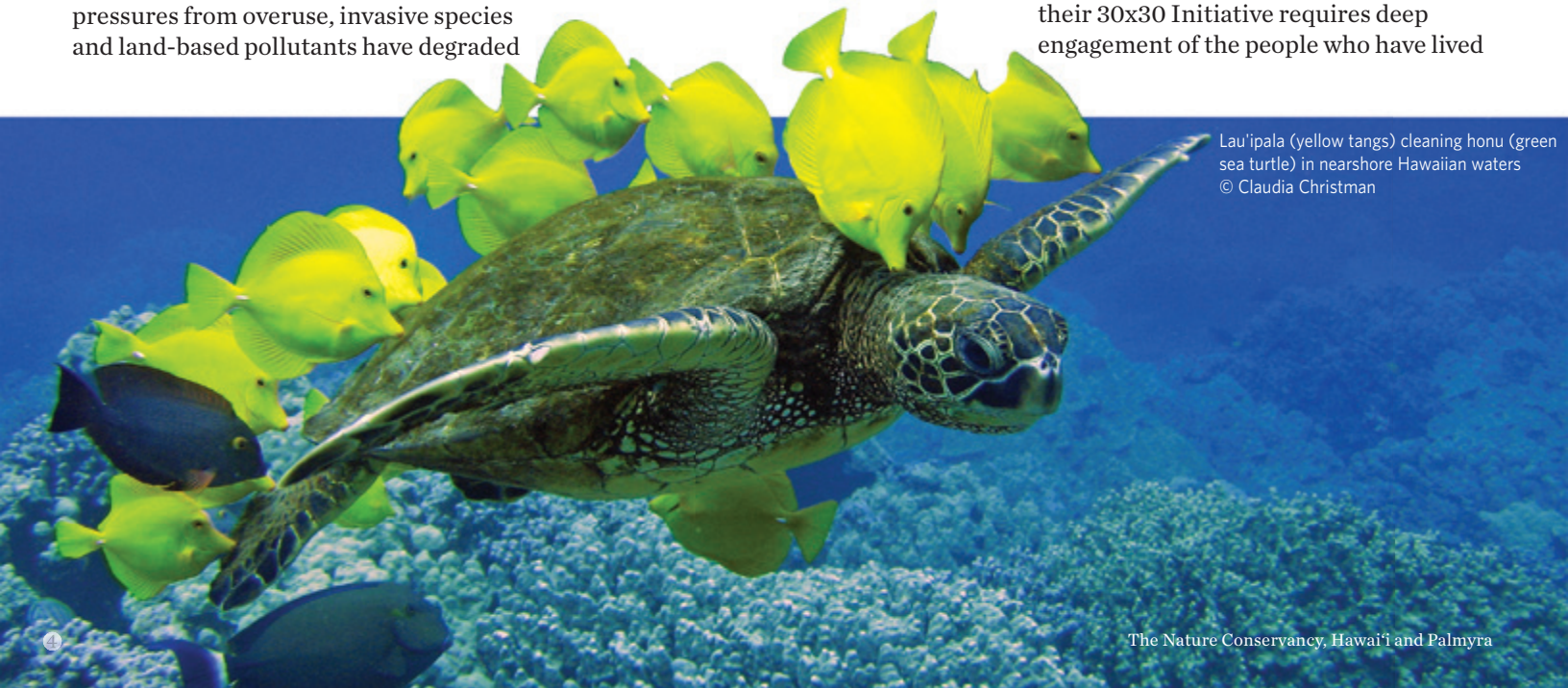
Hawaiʻi's unique marine habitats harbor coral reefs, fish and other marine life that are important cultural, food, recreational and economic resources that also provide protection from storms for coastal communities, roads, businesses and other infrastructure valued at more than $831 million annually. In addition to flood protection, reefs provide $10 million in nearshore fisheries that support local families and $1.6 billion in reef-related tourism. However, local pressures from overuse, invasive species and land-based pollutants have degraded reef health and contributed to a 75 to 90 percent decline in reef fish populations statewide. TNC has been working with local community and other partners for the past 20 years to address these challenges.

Our early efforts focused on removing invasive algae from Waikīkī, Maunalua Bay and Kāneʻohe Bay on Oʻahu, and evolved into working with local community partners whose lives and livelihoods are dependent on healthy coastal resources. Our work blends traditional knowledge and practices with the latest science to restore and protect the coral reefs that protect our shorelines and are home to fish and other marine life important to our way of life. Today we work with more than 50 communities across Hawaiʻi, supporting their efforts with conservation planning, scientific monitoring, education and outreach, active coastal management, and peer learning.

Working with the Maui Nui Makai Network, we jointly developed an action guidebook to help other communities learn how to effectively co-manage their coastal resources with the State. Our recently published Maui Atlas is a comprehensive report compiling 20 years of data detailing changes in the abundance and diversity of marine life in West Maui to help inform marine management moving forward. On Hawaiʻi Island at Kaʻūpūlehu, we helped the community establish a 10-year rest area in 2016, which is already showing significant increases in fish size and abundance.

Kaʻūpūlehu community leader Aunty Leinaʻala Keakealani Lightner shares, "Fishermen said it's starting to look like old Hawaiʻi—there are so many fish."

"The State's commitment to protect 30 percent of nearshore waters and watershed forests by 2030 under their 30x30 Initiative requires deep engagement of the people who have lived



Lau'ipala (yellow tangs) cleaning honu (green sea turtle) in nearshore Hawaiian waters
© Claudia Christman

in and relied upon our islands' natural resources for generations," says Kim Hum, TNC's Hawai'i Marine Program Director. "Their engagement and commitment is key to our collective success, and we are honored and humbled to be able to support their efforts mauka to makai."

Nestled in the vast Pacific Ocean along Polynesian voyaging routes 1,000 miles south of Hawai'i, Palmyra Atoll teems with life. Although blasting, dredging and dumping were common when Palmyra was a World War II Navy base, the atoll has since been given a chance to recover in the absence of persistent local impacts. With help from TNC and our partners, nature has rebounded to the point that many consider Palmyra to be near-pristine.

Palmyra's abundance and diversity show what a healthy island and coral reef should look like. At the preserve's North Beach, fish—including sharks and other apex predators—abound right up to the shoreline. On land, one of the world's best remaining tropical Pisonia rainforests stands, home to thousands of seabirds and crawling with at least 10 species of land crabs that are absent or rare on islands elsewhere.

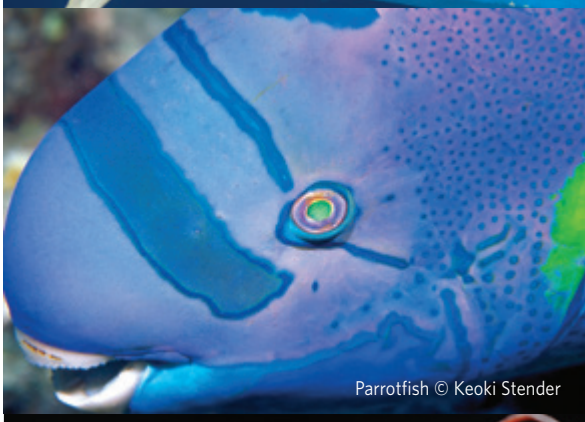
Palmyra Atoll was at one time being considered as a site for a nuclear waste dump, a private resort and a copra (coconut) plantation. Instead, TNC purchased Palmyra in 2000 to save this globally significant island ecosystem and facilitate the creation of one of the largest marine conservation areas in the world. In 2004, our Hawai'i Chapter made a home for Palmyra, inspired by the opportunity to restore a healthy functioning island ecosystem. Today, thanks to the hard work of TNC and our partners, Palmyra is now rat free and well on its way to a return of native forest dominance.

Our Palmyra Preserve is surrounded by 13 million acres of protected ocean managed by our partners at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA. Through TNC's Climate Adaptation & Resilience Laboratory, we are working to unlock the secrets that make Palmyra's ecosystem resilient to climate change. In 2015, unusually high ocean temperatures killed millions of corals from Australia to Hawai'i. Remarkably, many of Palmyra's reefs recovered within two years, demonstrating impressive resilience. Understanding what makes these reefs so strong and sharing those lessons can help other coral reefs survive—and thrive—in a changing climate.

Lessons from Palmyra can inform management efforts elsewhere. Research shows that healthy seabird and shark populations help coral reefs survive in warming oceans. Removing predators like rats and restoring forest habitat maximizes seabird abundance and strengthens resilience. Restoring seabirds and sharks in Hawai'i could help local reefs, too.

"Palmyra is a rare living laboratory with protections that allow for effective, efficient conservation learning," says Alex Wegmann, Palmyra Science Director. "We can isolate health factors and deliver them to help islands across the Pacific adapt to climate change."


Shark research at Palmyra Atoll © Tim Calver


Parrotfish © Keoki Stender


Coconut crab at Palmyra Atoll © Ian Shive


Healthy coral reefs host abundant fish populations. © Kydd Pollock/TNC


Wana (Collector sea urchin) in Kāne'ohe Bay on O'ahu © TNC

Our work recognizes everything is connected mauka to makai (mountains to ocean). © Lyle Krannichfeld

A Year-long 40th Anniversary Virtual Celebration

Our Philanthropy Team, led by Lori Admiral, hosted a 40th Anniversary virtual event series that began last September with *The Changemakers*. Executive Director Ulalia Woodside spoke with founding director Kelvin Taketa, recalling early stories of the chapter in the ’80s about our work to protect native plants and animals essential to life in Hawai‘i. They drew inspiration from marine fellow Kalani Quiocho, who expressed his hope for the next generations’ conservation impact as a shared vision merging science and culture. Our second webinar, *The Catalysts*, focused on TNC’s forest leaders who took us on an exploration of how TNC safeguards lands and Hawai‘i’s drinking water through the formation of watershed partnerships and native forest protection. The third webinar, *The Communities*, focused on the role of TNC as the link connecting local fishing communities with federal and state entities to ensure the health of reefs and fisheries for future generations.

Our final 40th anniversary webinar, *The Collaborators*, featured global research partnerships that TNC fosters at Palmyra Atoll. TNC’s Director of Science for the Palmyra Program Dr. Alex Wegmann and Dr. Sara Maxwell, researcher at the University of Washington, discussed their collaboration on Blue Water Marine Protected Areas, a project aimed at answering some of the key questions around conservation and climate change.

To watch recordings of our 40th Anniversary webinars, visit our webinars page on nature.org/hawaii.

Create Your Conservation Legacy

You have helped us protect Hawai‘i’s natural treasures through your commitment and generosity for four decades. Let’s look to the future together, as TNC continues to safeguard the lands and waters you love.

Through a gift to TNC in your will or trust, retirement plan or other estate plans, you can carry your legacy forward and help sustain and strengthen conservation for years to come. We look forward to our continued partnership in conservation and welcoming you as a member of our Legacy Club!

Contact Lara Siu, Hawai‘i Legacy Club Manager at (808) 587-6235 or lsiu@tnc.org.

Melissa Fisher

Meet Our New Philanthropy Team Member

Melissa Fisher joins our team as Philanthropy Writer after 13 years working in our conservation program, most recently as the Kaua‘i Forest program director. “For me, conservation started when I was a kid and my dad hounded me to turn off the lights and not leave the water running,” Melissa recalls. This led her to work for the protection of freshwater on Kaua‘i. As bringing donors to remote field projects was challenging, she began leading virtual hikes and using words to transport people into the forest. She decided to bring her conservation knowledge and storytelling skills to showcase the broader chapter. “Anyone interested in TNC’s projects is concerned about the environment, and I am excited to bring the stories out of the field and to those interested in our work.”

Janet Montag Reconnects to Nature in Her Backyard

Montag family in New York © Janet Montag

Janet Montag © Peter Hermann

"I was reinvigorated to add nature into our city life back at home."

Janet Montag grew up in cities along the East Coast, often playing in the backyard among the trees and her mom's fragrant rose garden or at nearby beaches. When work obligations took her, her husband Tom and their growing family from city to city, she unintentionally became disconnected with nature. While living in Tokyo 20 years ago, an unexpected Christmas vacation brought them to Hawai'i, and she immediately experienced the joy and harmony she felt while in nature during her early years.

"It wasn't something I noticed slipping away over time, but I was reinvigorated by our trip to Hawai'i to add nature into our city life back at home," Janet shared.

Although currently living in New York, Janet's bond with Hawai'i, her love of nature and strong desire to give back after a career in banking inspired her to accept the invitation to become a TNC Hawai'i trustee in 2018. She appreciates TNC's global reach, connection to place and the variety of backgrounds among trustees.

"Everyone has a unique perspective and lens that shapes their view of the world," she says. "That's enriching as a board member, and it helps guide TNC's work in Hawai'i."

Lori Admiral, Director of Philanthropy for TNC Hawai'i and Palmyra, agrees. "The weaving of expertise, similar to what we see in nature in a healthy ecosystem, also gives us a healthy board," she says.

Projects focusing on TNC's Hawai'i Island marine sites and Palmyra Atoll are Janet's priorities, and she has supported them generously. With a second home on Hawai'i Island, she has seen how TNC connects to communities, sharing knowledge and supporting efforts with scientific tools to help inform community efforts to replenish fisheries and protect reefs.

Marveling at the ability of nature to fix itself given the opportunity, Janet noted Palmyra Atoll's history as a military base during World War II. She is impressed with how well Palmyra has recovered after it was ravaged during war time, thanks in large part to TNC's restoration work since purchasing the atoll in 2000. And she is inspired by Palmyra's designation by Mission Blue as a Hope Spot and its role as a living laboratory with the potential to guide global strategies to respond to climate change.

Janet says clouds are a metaphor for life—always changing, always moving, and—once cleared—offering sunshine even after the worst storms. She shares that while the world has suffered during the global pandemic, one blessing she has experienced is the importance of slowing down and reconnecting with nature right outside her front door, from taking time to notice the birds to experiencing nature all around her.

Tom and Janet Montag © Janet Montag

Janet walks the talk, and so does her husband Tom, who generously supports TNC's Oregon chapter. Janet's hope is that everyone will consider taking meaningful action, large or small, to ensure we have a healthy planet to support not only our current but future generations.

– Melissa Fisher

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Haleakalā silversword © Bill Tipper

Haleakalā silversword © John De Mello

West Maui silversword © Robert Hoddy

Welcome to our 123 new Silversword Society members for their loyal support! The Silversword Society honors our chapter members who have supported The Nature Conservancy for 20 years or more. Created in 2008, the Silversword Society has grown to more than 2,000 members and counting. We are grateful for their long-term commitment and vision for the health and future of our natural world.

The silversword or ʻahinahina (meaning "silvery") is a rare and endangered endemic plant that grows in the upland regions of Mauna Kea, Mauna Loa, Haleakalā and the West Maui Mountains. Silverswords may grow for decades as a compact rosette before producing a single, spectacular flowering stalk, which lasts only a few weeks. They are natural treasures, like our Silversword Society members!

Background: Mauna Kea silversword © Evelyn Wight