



Thirty Years of Banding Hawaiian Coot and Hawaiian Moorhen, 1977 – 2008

Arleone Dibben-Young¹

Introduction

Bird banding – the marking of birds for identification of individuals – is an essential tool for the research of behavior and social structure, populations, productivity and longevity, survival from disease, or management challenges. Birds are banded by conservation agencies, university associates, avocational ornithologists, natural resource managers, and private sector businesses. More than 63,000,000 birds have been banded across North America since 1909, when the American Bird Banding Association was formed to assist the growing number of banders on the continent (Tautin 2002). In the Hawaiian Islands bird banding has been utilized only infrequently for research and for few species. The Territory of Hawai'i's first wildlife biologist, J. Donald Smith, banded 35 Hawaiian Coot 1949 – 1952 captured during a waterfowl migration study (T.H. Fish and Game Div. banding sheets); almost thirty years would pass before this species would be banded again for research purposes. This paper presents the efforts and results of studies that banded the endangered Hawaiian Coot (*Fulica alai*) and Hawaiian Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus sandvicensis*) by the Hawai'i Division of Forestry and Wildlife 1977 – 1991, and a synopsis of those by others 2000 – 2008.

Hawai'i Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW)

Banding and auxiliary marking of Hawaiian Coot and Hawaiian Moorhen was performed under two consecutive projects: Description of waterbird habitats as related to food availability and feeding behavior of endangered waterbird species on the islands of Kaua'i and O'ahu (1977 – 1980), and Statewide waterbird marking/movement study (1980 – 1992), which in 1983 incorporated a disease study. An additional objective of the movement study was to determine if American Coot (*Fulica americana*) occur as migrants within the Hawaiian Coot population (DOFAW 1979. Engilis and Pratt 1993. H.D.Pratt 1978, 1987).

Study areas

Hanalei NWR, and Kolo, Waiawa, Waita and Wailua reservoirs were chosen to capture Hawaiian Coots for the Kaua'i segments of the projects. The Ki'i Unit of James Campbell NWR was chosen for the O'ahu portions. Although the movement study was to include a Maui site, no documents indicated this occurred.

The O'ahu capture site for the Hawaiian Moorhen was determined by results of the 1978 statewide waterbird survey which indicated the lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*) fields belonging to Shizuo Kunihiro west of Ki'iki 'i Stream in Hale'iwa held the largest population (DOFAW 1979. Nagata 1983). The fields were a patchwork of berms and canals constructed in close proximity to springs, with excavated plots tiered to maintain a gravity-flow of fresh water at a depth of 2 inches. Moorhens typically moved between the individual plots depending on the planting period, and preferred freshly harvested areas (S. Nagata pers. comm.). Fields were rarely entered by farmers after new rootstock was planted, creating the optimal environment for the cryptic behavior of moorhen.



Burr, Nagata, and Sutterfield (kneeling) taking down the mist nets at the Hale'iwa lotus fields 9 May 1983.

Photo by Richard A. Coleman

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Capture methods

Moorhens were captured with mist nets, and funnel- and box-traps. Several methods were tried for coots: A simple box-type trap dropped by remote control, the clap net of Christensen (1962), a funnel-trap, at night using hand-held nets from a boat while temporarily blinding the birds with a Q-Beam, throw nets, and mist nets with various mesh sizes. All methods had poor outcome. Seven years into the movement study cannon nets were tested with greatly improved capture rates, thus, this method was used until 1990 when banding efforts ended.

Banding and auxiliary marking

Although banding activities began December 1977, auxiliary marking was not implemented until after collars (neck bands) were tested. On 26 September 1978, a captive Hawaiian Coot at the Honolulu Zoo was fitted with the first collar. Five Hawaiian Moorhens were captured in the Kunihiro fields on 4 April 1979, specifically for collar testing and transported to the zoo (DOFAW 1979).

Spiral plastic turkey leg bands, size 914, made by National Band and Tag Company, were used as collars. The bands were yellow [Y - O'ahu] (DOFAW 1979), red [R - Kaua'i] (DOFAW 1980), blue [B - Moloka'i] (DOFAW 1983), and green for Maui (T. Burr pers. comm.. DOFAW 1990), and embossed with numbers 1 – 100. Bands were sealed by melting overlap portions with acetone (DOFAW 1979).

After seven months of testing, it was concluded that neither species was adversely affected by the collars (DOFAW 1979), and they were immediately put into use. On 20 October 1982, three years after the second project segment began, the only known collar-related mortality occurred, when coot Y-45 was discovered in Ki'i Unit six days after it was marked. Burr wrote "Death appeared to have been caused by the lower mandible caught between the inner and outer spiral of the neck collar" (DOFAW 1983).

While the loss of Y-45 was discouraging, the advantage of neck collars for identifying individual birds when in water or dense habitat was evident when coot Y-33, banded at Ki'i Unit 14 October 1982, was spotted on 11 January 1983, in the

Kunihiro lotus fields. It was the first observation of a coot in the fields since regular observations began November 1978, and the first documented intra-island movement of the species (DOFAW 1983).

A sixth moorhen was captured at the Hale'iwa fields, and transported to the Honolulu Zoo for additional testing on collars with the overlap reduced from 2.5 to 0.5 inches (DOFAW 1983). No other collar-related mortalities were recorded with the new design.



National Band and Tag Company turkey leg bands used as neck collars.

Observations of marked birds

Few observations were made of marked birds throughout the 14-year study, citing the reassignment of personnel to other projects for 50% of the study duration or that the coots moved to

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Ni'ihau (25%). Collared birds were only observed on the banding island. On O'ahu, in addition to coot Y-33, marked moorhens were sighted five times at the Kunihiro fields during the seven-year period the fields were surveyed. Only four collared coots were noted on Kaua'i's biannual waterbird surveys.



Hawaiian Coot fitted with custom Darvic® collar, Kaunakakai, Moloka'i.
Photo Arleone Dibben-Young ©2008

Reintroduction of Hawaiian Moorhen to Moloka'i

Eleven moorhens were captured at the Kunihiro lotus fields 9 May 1983 (T. Burr, pers. comm.), and transported to the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture Animal Quarantine Branch at Halawa, where Dr. Thomas Sawa sexed the birds by laparoscope. After five days, one female was transported to the Honolulu Zoo, and three females and one male were banded and marked with yellow collars and returned to their capture site. The remaining six birds, three of each sex, were banded and marked with blue collars, shipped to Moloka'i, and released at Kakahai'a Pond NWR, five miles east of Kaunakakai (DOFAW 1983). Two of the released birds were observed two months later (DOFAW waterbird survey form July 1983, DOFAW 1984), the moorhen with collar B-38 was found dead 2 January 1985 (DOFAW banding sheet 53630665 – 30675 1985), and Richard Coleman and David Woodside observed a moorhen 12 December 1985 (R. Coleman pers. comm., Pyle 2006a). On 5 February 1986, Jim Krakowski made the last observation of a moorhen released at the refuge (Pyle 2006a). Shortly thereafter, the remaining five moorhens were eaten by a neighbor adjacent to the refuge that "...thought they were swimming chickens" (Name withheld by request pers. comm.).

Kaua'i Hawaiian Moorhen translocations

In November 1985, four Hawaiian Moorhens were implicated in corn seedling depredations in the fields at the Pioneer Hi-Bred International office in Kekaha, across the highway from the drainage ditch which they inhabited (T. Kaiakapu and Pioneer Hi-Bred Intl. personnel pers. comms.). The moorhens were captured, banded and collared, and transported 23 miles to the opposite side of the island to Ahukini Reservoir at the Lihu'e Plantation Company near Lihu'e Airport. Within two weeks at least one of the birds was observed back at the capture site (DOFAW 1986), and all four eventually returned (T. Kaiakapu and Pioneer Hi-Bred Intl. personnel pers. comms.). Three years later, two juvenile moorhens were observed eating

corn seedlings at the same location. These birds were captured and banded, and translocated across the island to the Niumalu wetlands on Pu'ali Stream, up-river from the Nawiliwili Small Boat Harbor. They, too, returned to the capture site (T. Kaiakapu and Pioneer Hi-Bred Intl. personnel pers. comms.).

DOFAW project results

Birds were banded during eight of the 14 project years. Monitoring occurred on O'ahu for a short period after banding and then opportunistically (T. Burr pers. comm.). For most years no records were found indicating that deliberate searches were made for marked birds other than during the biannual waterbird surveys. Although the job completion reports for W-18-R¹ contain the emetic trials food analyses, the project documents and related materials including the study photographs potentially documenting a continental² visitor were disposed of. The biological samples and lab reports containing baseline data of parasite, bacteria, and virus load in Hawaiian waterbird populations were purged from the state lab following the retirement of Dr. Sawa in 2001 (J. Foppoli pers. comm.).

Synopsis of banding projects 2000 – 2008

Recovery from avian botulism at Keālia Pond NWR, Maui

In October 2000, Keālia Pond NWR experienced the first major outbreak of avian botulism since the refuge was established in 1992, killing more than 140 birds (Maui News 2000. M. Nishimoto unpubl. data). In 2002 and 2004 the disease hit the refuge again. All Hawaiian Coots recovered from botulism during these outbreaks were banded by Michael Nishimoto; a bird banded in 2002 was recaptured at the refuge in 2008 while trapping for avian influenza surveillance.

Genetics of Oceania moorhen

Hawaiian Moorhen were banded in 2002 by University of Hawai'i student Alex Handler to investigate the genetics of moorhens throughout the Hawaiian Islands and across the Pacific Ocean to determine how many populations of this endangered group exist and would benefit by protection. Handler terminated the project in 2003 following the capture of a four-foot-long crocodile in his mist nets in the Palau islands, turned-in his banding data to DOFAW³, and shifted his efforts towards an unrelated feral ungulate project.

Monitoring response to habitat restoration at Hāmākua Marsh State Wildlife Sanctuary

The Hāmākua Marsh Ecosystem Restoration and Community Development Project began in 2001, with the removal of nearly four acres of red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*) and out-planting of over 1,000 nursery-propagated native wetland plants (Smith and Polhemus 2003). In 2004 and 2007 moorhens were captured at the marsh by DOFAW personnel and banded to gain information on response to restoration efforts, movement patterns and dispersal (Polhemus and Smith 2005). Although the banded birds were sighted regularly at the marsh, none were observed at other O'ahu wetlands.

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Hawaiian Moorhen call-response and molt studies

David DesRochers of Tufts University, and Aaron Nadig and Michael Silbernagle (USFWS) banded Hawaiian Moorhen on O'ahu 2004 – 2007, with study results of conspecific call broadcast suggesting that the population is larger than previously estimated (DesRochers *et al.* 2008) and that the flightless period during molt may last as long as 25 days, thereby increasing the risk of predation (DesRochers *et al.* 2009).

Avian influenza (AI) surveillance

DOFAW, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Fish and Wildlife Service personnel trapped Hawaiian Coots and Hawaiian Moorhens 2007 – 2008 on Kaua'i, Maui, and O'ahu for H5N1 AI surveillance. Biological samples were collected to determine if these native species had co-mingled with migratory birds carrying AI: All samples tested negative (Hawai'i-Pacific Islands Working Group 2008).

Avian botulism

In 2007, Dibben-Young began a banding project to study the connectivity of Moloka'i wetlands to improve response time to and management of avian botulism outbreaks on the island, and to monitor recovered birds. Custom Darvic® collars were utilized for the Hawaiian Coot. Four designs were tested on a non-releasable coot held under education permit, with the final collar 3/4 in. H x 7/8 in. ID and 1/2 in. overlap (unsealed), with three black digits followed by a dash and repeated three times around the circumference on a white background.

Inter-island movements of Hawaiian Coot documented as a result of banding projects

It is generally understood that the Hawaiian Coot will travel between islands based on eruptive population fluctuations (Udvardy 1960. DOFAW 1988) in response to rainfall (Engilis and Pratt 1993). No sightings of marked birds, however, were made on an island other than the banding island until a Hawaiian Coot banded at James Campbell NWR for AI surveillance was observed at the Kaunakakai Wastewater Reclamation Facility (KWWRf) on Moloka'i 9 January through 5 July 2008. Another coot, collared on 27 December 2007, at the KWWRf vacated the site 4 January 2008, and was observed 10 January 2008, at Keālia Pond NWR. This bird returned to the banding site 30 April 2008, and was recovered 27 June 2008, in the parking lot with the death attributed to feral cat depredation.

Research recommendations

Little is known about the movement patterns of Hawaiian Coot and Hawaiian Moorhen. Resident birds will vacate an established territory and return months later to reoccupy the same site (A. Dibben-Young and A. Nadig pers. obs.). Absences such as these indicate movement studies should be continued to identify habitat that is being overlooked and could be managed or protected for these species. Bannor and Kiviat (2002) and Pratt and Brisbin (2002) recommend studies for all aspects of the biology of these two species. The use of radio and satellite telemetry would benefit research efforts substantially as previously unknown habitats are identified and life history data

is accumulated, thus providing a better understanding of the needs of these secretive rails.

Acknowledgments

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Kaunakakai, Moloka'i, Hawai'i 96748
researchbirds@yahoo.com

1. The microfilm records (2,720 pages) for Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act-funded project W-18-R, 1975 to 1992, were located in the basement of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office, Portland, Oregon, in a box labeled for disposal. Dan Edwards, Wildlife Section Chief, arranged for the reels to be scanned to portable document file (pdf). Copies were supplied on compact disk to DOFAW, the Hawai'i Audubon Society, and the Hawaiian collection at Hamilton Library, University of Hawai'i, Mānoa. Documents include project applications and agreements, memorandums, telephone conversation logs, correspondence, schedule of supervisory and technical personnel, and job completion reports for Hawai'i's non-game and endangered avian species.
2. Robert Pyle (2006b) stated Sightings contains 27 unconfirmed observations of American Coot in the Hawaiian Islands.
3. Although Handler provided his banding data to DOFAW (A. Handler email to C. McQuire 30 March 2006), only two banding schedules were submitted by DOFAW to the USGS Bird Banding Lab. All other banding data has been misplaced (D. DesRochers email to A. Dibben-Young 25 September 2008).

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Membership in Hawaii Audubon Society 2010

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PLEASE LET US KNOW IF YOUR ADDRESS CHANGES.

Hawaiian Coot & Hawaiian Moorhen Banded 1977-2008		
Bander	Hawaiian Coot	Hawaiian Moorhen
DOFAW (T.Burr, T.Telfer, R.Walker)	161	25
DOFAW (J.Misaki, J.Polhemus, D.Smith)	-	15
DOFAW/USDA/USFWS (AI surveillance team)	254	8
USFWS (M.Nishimoto)	20	-
UH (A.Handler)	-	Unknown
Tufts (D.DesRochers), USFWS (A.Nadig, M.Silbernagle)	-	108
A.Dibben-Young	22	-
Total birds banded	457	156

**The 111th Christmas Bird Count:
Tuesday, December 14, 2010 to
Wednesday, January 5, 2011**

We are currently looking for volunteers for various counts State wide! Please contact Casey at hiaudsoc@pixi.com if you would like to participate in this years count!

From December 14 through January 5 tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas take part in an adventure that has become a family tradition among generations. Families and students, birders and scientists, armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists go out on an annual mission - often before dawn. For over one hundred years, the desire to both make a difference and to experience the beauty of nature has driven dedicated people to leave the comfort of a warm house during the Holiday season.

Each of the citizen scientists who annually braves snow, wind, or rain, to take part in the Christmas Bird Count makes an enormous contribution to conservation. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations - and to help guide conservation action. This year's count will help help scientists understand the impact of the Gulf oil spill on vulnerable species.

From feeder-watchers and field observers to count compilers and regional editors, everyone who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count does it for love of birds and the excitement of friendly competition -- and with the knowledge that their efforts are making a difference for science and bird conservation.

Membership Renewal Notice

Membership renewals as well as new Board member ballots will be coming out in the mail this month please remember to renew your membership and vote! We would love to have the ballots back before our annual meeting in December so that we can announce and introduce or new board members!

ATTENTION Birder Travelers!

The Hawai'i Audubon Society has an extensive natural history library at it's office at 850 Richards St. (Ste. 505) in Honolulu including bird field guides to several parts of the mainland and the world. If you are planning to travel and do some birding elsewhere, the Society is willing to lend you a field guide for a donation or, as an option, sell you a copy at a very reasonable rate. Some of the foreign areas covered are Japan, Nepal, Korea, Britain, Europe, Mexico and Costa Rica. For North America, books on the Western and Eastern regions, Texas, Colorado, the Rio Grande Valley, Southeastern Arizona and the Northwest are available. If you don't want to purchase a new bird guide to the area you are traveling to and perhaps never use it again, this is an opportunity. Contact hiaudsoc@pixi.com to arrange for a deal.

2010 Audubon Legislative Summary & Advocacy Update

by George Massengale, JD Legislative Analyst

The 2010 Legislative session was colored by Hawaii's continuing budget crisis. This year, the budget shortfall was \$1.2 billion. This was in addition to budget cuts already made to numerous state programs, furloughs and layoffs in 2009. The fiscal crisis was impacting and crippling many state programs including those addressing critical conservation and environmental issues. It was clear at the onset of this Legislative session that the Audubon Society would once again have to fight to prevent cuts to existing programs such as funding for DLNR's Land Conservation Program.

This year over 200 bills were introduced or carried over from the 2009 session that could have either a positive or negative impact on our environmental resources and conservation efforts.

While Hawaii's fiscal outlook was bleak we were able, along with our partner organizations, to move forward several pieces of meaningful legislation that will have a substantial impact in protecting various endangered species.

In addition to legislative activities, we also urged our Congressional members to establish permanent ongoing funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This fund helps protect the Volcano National Park on the Big Island, and the James Campbell National Wildlife Refuge on Oahu.

Finally, last September we offered extensive comments regarding the Obama Administration's efforts to develop a new National Ocean Policy, specifically tailored to ensure that our coastal areas and oceans are managed effectively and responsibly for future generations.

Our Successes

Working in collaboration with our partner organizations, we were successful in obtaining passage for the following bills:

- HB1684 – Relating to Invasive Species: Re-established court enforced penalties for the importation, possession or transporting or invasive species to Hawaii.
- HB1808 – Beach Access: Requires landowners to keep public beach shorelines from induced or unmaintained vegetation.
- HB2775 – Relating to Agriculture: Extends user fees for issuing permits to import certain living species into Hawaii, including plants and soils, animals, and micro-organisms.
- HB 2943, SB 2953 – Relating to capital improvement projects: funds plans to restore water flow from Kawainui March to Kawainui stream (\$425k), update of the Kawainui Marsh Master Plan (\$400k), design of Kawainui Marsh visitor facility, wildlife habitat

restoration areas, trails (\$150k) and construction (\$250k).

- SB2169 – Harvesting of Shark Fins: Prohibits the possession or distribution of shark fins in Hawaii.
- SB2441 – Endangered Species: Makes it a class C felony to harm monk seals.
- SB2523 – Agricultural Inspections: Assesses penalties for individuals and companies that fail to pay inspection fees. It also exempts bulk shipments, such gravel and cement, from cargo inspection fees.

We were successful in killing a number of bills that would have a negative impact on our environment or funding for conservation programs. Our biggest victory was the derailment of HB2885 which would have suspended the distribution of a portion of the conveyance tax to the Land Conservation Fund.

Finally, we supported a number of House and Senate Concurrent Resolutions addressing issues that are consistent with our mission of fostering community values that protect and restore native ecosystems, and conserve natural resources through education, science and advocacy. Most notable resolutions were:

- HCR86 – Prince Kuhio Park Kauai: Urges the County of Kauai to restore the natural flow of water from the historic fishpond to the shoreline. The flow of water was disrupted in 1982 following Hurricane Iwa when Lawai Beach Road was constructed to provide access.
- HCR178 – Energy Awareness Month: Stating this year, the month of October will be recognized as Energy Awareness Month. Hawaii residents will be encouraged to support clean energy in their homes and businesses to help protect our environment.
- HCR216 – Expresses support for Hawaii to pursue the bid to host the 2016 International Union for Conservation of Nature World Conservation Congress. The theme of the 2016 WCC conference will be "Oceania."

Once again, I would like to thank our legislative partners, the Conservation Council of Hawaii, Nature Conservancy, Sierra Club, and Life of the Land. In particular, I would like to say "Mahalo nui loa" to Linda Paul who shared the burden with me; testifying at a number of legislative committee hearings thus making sure that our voice was heard.

Hopefully, with improvements in our State's economy and the advent of a new state administration we can once again move forward and obtain vital support for legislation addressing a number of critical ecological issues that continue to endanger our unique and fragile ecosystem.



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Please check our website for count dates, locations and contacts if you are interested in leading a count this year please email hiaudsoc@pixi.com

FSP service work

Remember starting in January we will be leading service trips out to the Freeman Seabird Preserve hopefully every weekend through March we have lots of work to get done in a short amount of time while the birds are away. This years nesting season was successful thanks to all the efforts of our volunteers last years so please come help us maintain and restore our beautiful nesting site!

Field Trips

Please check our website for upcoming trips or feel free to call the office!

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