

Short-tailed Albatross Fledges at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge Endangered Bird's Departure Carries More Hope for the Species

By John Klavitter and Ann Bell, Papāhānaumokuākea Marine National Monument

(Midway Atoll, HI) For only the second time in recorded history, a short-tailed albatross has fledged outside of Japan. The fledgling was last observed June 10, 2012, exercising its wings near its nest site and taking a short test flight from Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge within the Papāhānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. The young albatross has not been seen since it was observed flying so it is likely headed to the nutrient rich waters of the Bering Sea. This is a momentous occasion for species recovery efforts across the Pacific and beyond, bringing hope for other species on the brink of extinction.

This event occurred on the cusp of an emotional commemorative 70th Anniversary of the Battle of Midway ceremony held on Midway Atoll June 4, 2012. During the ceremony, USFWS Regional Director Robyn Thorson noted in her remarks that the recovery of the short-tailed albatross was attributed to cooperative recovery conservation efforts by the United States and Japan who, 70 years ago, were at war. Perhaps it is no coincidence that international oceanographer Dr. Sylvia Earle noted just hours before the chick's hatching in January 2012 that Midway Atoll is a *hope spot* for the world.

The stout and amazingly tough chick is the second of its kind to hatch from a location other than Japan and now takes to the seas. After a courtship of nearly three years, last January the chick's parents, a nine year-old female and 25-year-old male, laid and successfully hatched a large whitish egg. They spent the next five months finding and bringing food to their chick every three to six days. Masters of the wind, they logged tens of thousands of miles, soaring between Midway and nutrient-rich feeding grounds 1,000 miles to the northwest. They foraged mainly from the surface on squid, fish and shrimp. Days later they regurgitated food from the sea to the chick back at the Refuge. In May, after months of steady feeding and growth, the chick lost most of its downy look and began stretching and exercising its wings. The health and strength of the chick is a testament to the care and skill of its parents.

Anticipating its fledging, Refuge biologists Pete Leary and Greg Schubert banded the chick on May 30. Assistant Refuge Manager John Klavitter sited the bird on the morning of June



10. As Klavitter captured video he saw the chick flap from the edge of an embankment, leap fearlessly into the air and fly 50 meters toward the emergent reef and then settle gracefully on the water. The bird then turned around and paddled back to shore and walked back up the embankment as if it had already performed several of these *practice* flights. Klavitter may have witnessed the chick's last appearance from its home nesting island before it returns again in three to seven years to find a mate.

Once one of the world's rarest birds, the endangered short-tailed albatross continues to recover, said Refuge Manager Sue Schulmeister. Sightings of the species have been relatively rare over the years, even on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. In the years to come, following this event, perhaps that will start to change.

Short-tailed albatross depend on the marine resources and habitats of the Monument and the North Pacific to survive. They reside seven to nine months on Midway Atoll NWR and the Japanese islands of Torishima and Minami-kojima to court, reproduce and nest, and the rest of the year at sea, resting and spending countless days soaring in search of food.

Chicks hopefully grow to become adults, all the while refining the skills necessary to live the demanding and fascinating life of their relatives across the globe — if they are able to avoid hazards faced by every albatross in our modern world: ingesting too much plastic, getting caught in a fishery long-line and marine debris or being eaten by sharks. So far Midway's fledgling is proving it knows how to survive.

This event is not an isolated miracle in our international efforts to expand the range and population of this species, Fish and Wildlife Service Acting Monument Superintendent, Don Palawski, one of seven managers of the Papāhānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, said of the fledging. With diligent and vigilant care, species can return, and it reminds us of the responsibility we all have, with involvement and support of an international public, to continue to work diligently together, especially for species that are dependent upon on both the land and the sea. (NEWS RELEASE, June 14, 2012) More photos and video available at www.fws.gov/Midway/whatsnew.html

The Japanese white-eye as a potential pollinator of native Hawaiian plants

by Clare Aslan

Smith Postdoctoral Fellow of the Society for Conservation Biology, UC Santa Cruz

RESEARCH NOTES: Anyone interested in biodiversity conservation in Hawaii becomes quickly acquainted with non-native species. Not only are household pests in the islands almost universally non-native (for example, mosquitoes and cockroaches), but introduced species can be directly credited with the loss of a host of Hawaiian endemic species. Extinct and endangered plants and animals include many remarkable forms that carry within them the unique history of the islands and are themselves legacies of volcanic eruptions, trans-oceanic migrations, and unique partnerships. Hawaii has been called both the extinction capital and the invasion capital of the United States. It is impossible to learn about and care for Hawaiian native species without considering these two processes.

Some of Hawaii's most notable species are the results of dramatic pulses of evolution known as adaptive radiation. Adaptive radiation occurs when a species arrives in a site and is able to fill a wide diversity of open or available roles in the ecosystem. The descendents of that colonizer diversify (morphologically, behaviorally, ecologically, etc.) to suit those roles. Over time, dozens or hundreds of closely-related species, sometimes visibly very different from one another, may arise.

Adaptive radiations could be propelled by interactions between species. The Hawaiian honeycreepers radiated into a number of dietary classes (insectivores, frugivores, etc.). They also diversified in body size and bill shape. Many specialized on nectar and developed long or curved bills able to access nectar pools in flowers of different sizes. Perhaps as a result, the Hawaiian lobeliad flowers (ʻōhā wai) experienced their own adaptive radiation, diversifying in flower size, curvature, color, and other features. Large, closed, or heavily curved flowers allowed only honeycreepers with long or strongly curved bills to access their nectar. When a bird with an appropriate bill size and shape visited a flower and extracted nectar, the flower's pollen was deposited on the bird's head, to be transported to another flower. The bird obtained large amounts of rich nectar, and the flower obtained pollen transfer. This kind of interaction is known as a mutualism. Over many thousands of years, such mutualisms may have contributed to the development of unique species among both the lobeliads and the honeycreepers.

Fast-forward to the present: Large numbers of Hawaiian species have been lost. Birds have become extinct as a result of habitat loss, predator introductions, and importation of avian diseases and the mosquitoes that transmit them. Plants have been lost through forest clearing and land conversion. What happens to species that remain but have lost their mutualist partners? Are they also doomed to extinction as a consequence?

As a researcher, I am interested in disruption of such partnerships and what the consequences of that disruption may be. A year ago, I began a research project in Hawaii to investigate whether non-native birds might, under some circumstances, have the potential to provide pollination services for native plants. In the case of plants that have lost their native

bird partners, pollination by non-native birds might keep the plants from becoming extinct themselves.

I focused my field work on three lobeliad species on the Big Island (*Clermontia parviflora*, *Clermontia montis-loa*, and *Clermontia hawaiiensis*) to determine whether they are interacting with non-native birds. These lobeliads are common enough to allow me to observe bird visitation to their flowers in multiple locations. They also vary widely in the size of their flowers: *Clermontia parviflora* has the smallest flowers in the genus; *Clermontia montis-loa* produces robust, medium-sized flowers; and *Clermontia hawaiiensis* makes very large flowers with narrow floral openings. The most common non-native bird in my study sites is the Japanese white-eye, a small-bodied and extremely widespread songbird with a short, straight bill.

After hundreds of hours of flower visitation observations (staring at birds in trees) as well as dozens of manual pollination treatments, it appears clear that the Japanese white-eye does effectively visit and pollinate *Clermontia parviflora* and *Clermontia montis-loa*. The shape, size, and openness of the flowers of both species allow the white-eyes to enter from the front of the flower, access the nectar pool, and transfer pollen on their heads. A few native birds were also observed in the plants (apapane in *Clermontia parviflora* and i'iwi in *Clermontia montis-loa*). However, more than 85% of total visits to these species were performed by Japanese white-eyes, and flowers visited by white-eyes yielded more seeds than randomly-selected flowers did. Most active pollination of these two species appears to be due to the white-eye.

By contrast, the large-flowered *Clermontia hawaiiensis* received no pollination visits from any birds during the course



Photo by Tom Dove

continued on page 27

of my study. The few birds (white-eyes and amakihi) alighting in these trees either ignored the flowers or pierced them at the base to extract nectar, avoiding the pollen entirely and acting as nectar-robbers. Furthermore, most *Clermontia hawaiiensis* flowers yielded small numbers of seeds, implying that little pollen transfer is occurring.

The results of this study suggest that the Japanese white-eye is an effective lobeliad partner under limited circumstances. As long as the lobeliad flowers are small enough and open wide enough, the white-eye can transfer pollen and likely promote persistence in those species. When the flowers are too large, however, the white-eye cannot do the job, and pollen transfer is likely rare.

I have also found that, across the board, *Clermontia* species producing larger flowers are more likely to be endangered than those producing small flowers. One reason might be the reliance of large-flowered plants on native birds. As large native birds have been lost and remnant native bird populations have shrunk, these plants may now be widowed: left without essential partnerships. Along with habitat losses and other pressures, such disrupted interactions may threaten several *Clermontia* species.

This study provides evidence that a non-native species, in the absence of natives, may be exerting a positive effect in this one area. However, the role of Japanese white-eyes in Hawaiian ecosystems is complex. For example, it has been suggested

they may compete for food with native birds. As a conservation biologist, I would not suggest that we promote Japanese white-eye populations or deliberately introduce them to new islands. So why might it be important to identify positive impacts like pollination?

One key application is in conservation prioritization and planning. For native plants that are pollinated by the white-eye, efforts to conserve and restore populations might consider white-eye presence as a resource that can be utilized: we know a pollination system will be in place if the plants are brought back into a restoration area, for example. For native plants that are not aided by the white-eye, we're going to have to look elsewhere. Restoration efforts may need to be concentrated where remnant native bird populations are known to persist or may need to include hand-pollination by humans. Any effort to conserve and restore native plant populations will not occur in a vacuum: the set of species currently in place in Hawaii's forests represent potential interaction partners and must be taken into account.

Given their abundance, Japanese white-eyes are not likely to be removed from Hawaii. At the same time, some native birds, including likely pollinators and seed dispersers, are gone forever. By understanding more fully both the positive and negative roles that white-eyes play in Hawaii, we have a greater amount of information on which to base decision-making and on which to structure conservation strategies.

BOOK REVIEW

By Ron Walker

RAT ISLAND

(Predators in Paradise and the World's Greatest Wildlife Rescue)

by William Stolzenburg

Bloomsbury USA, New York, 2011

279 Pages

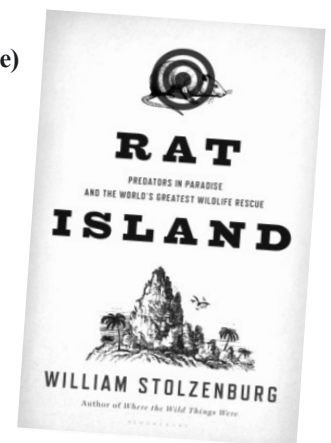
An island in the Aleutian chain of Alaska called "Hawadax" by the natives was renamed "Rat Island" by a Russian explorer in 1827 because it was so overrun with Norway rats left there by a wrecked Japanese fishing vessel in 1778. This is the story of the successful eradication of this predator of Crested and Least Auklets and the methods used. But it also discusses predation problems on the much larger island of Kiska and islands around the world, including Hawaii. It tells a conservation story involving a number of rare bird species, alien predators and landmasses (New Zealand, Mexico, Kamchatka, Anacapa, Oahu and Molokai). Not only are rats implicated, but also cats, goats, pigs, foxes, weasels, mongooses, snakes and even ants. Targets include not only seabirds, but also native mice, songbirds, and lizards.

The author discusses the methods used in eradication of predators including aerial broadcast of rat baits, applying poisons such as strychnine, 1080, cyanide and warfarin, plus more traditional methods using leg-hold traps and night shooting with lights. He admits these raise many ethical

questions and controversies among managers, scientists, hunters, and conservation groups, but he also says that if total eradication is the goal, an aggressive team approach among all of these entities is necessary.

The story points out that islands "...have produced 20% of the Earth's terrestrial animals on just 5% of its' land mass". Islands have also suffered as many as two out of every 3 extinct birds and reptiles. Although it focuses on islands, it does so in the larger context of world wildlife conservation. The author skips around a bit in his narrative, but always in an exceedingly readable manner.

The book includes acknowledgments and 43 pages of bibliography so is well documented. It is highly recommended.



Ka'ena Point Predator Proof Fence Helps Restore Native Dune Ecosystem

Albatross nesting at highest recorded levels

By William J. Aila, Jr., Chairperson, DLNR

News in Brief:

Ka'ena Point, O'ahu-

A year after the completion of the DLNR Predator Proof Fence at Ka'ena Point Natural Area Reserve, the 59-acre wilderness area at O'ahu's northwestern-most point has seen a return of native vegetation and an encouraging increase in nesting seabird populations. As hoped for, nesting albatross have increased, showing the highest number of nests ever recorded. The albatross that nest at the point provide one of only three accessible albatross colonies in the world.

"We are pleased by the success of the predator proof fence at Ka'ena in protecting the last remaining intact coastal dune ecosystems on O'ahu. These results are encouraging other similar projects throughout Hawai'i, and may serve as a model for others in the country," said William J. Aila, Jr., DLNR Chairperson.

The Ka'ena fence is the first in the United States to use this type of fine mesh predator-proof fencing technology, which prevents dogs, cats, rats, mongoose, and even mice from attacking ground-nesting seabird populations and eating native vegetation. The fence was funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with additional funds from the Hawai'i Tourism Authority for outreach and signage.

As hoped for, nesting albatross have increased, showing the highest number of nests ever recorded. Currently there are 34 active nests, many of which are in close view of the designated walking paths. While it used to be a rare treat to catch a glimpse of one of the fluffy albatross chicks, it's now a common, but still special, occurrence.

In 2011, the Wedge-tailed Shearwaters nesting in the reserve also experienced a record high number of chicks fledged, most likely due to elimination of predation. Nesting albatross, whales, and monk seals all make the months of

February through April one of the best times of year to visit reserve. Sparsely vegetated, the reserve contains three species of endangered plants, archaeological evidence of an ancient Hawaiian fishing village, fragile coral reefs, sandy beaches, and a number of isolated coves that represent unique marine habitats for the north O'ahu coastline.

The albatross that nest at the point provide one of only three accessible albatross colonies in the world. Ka'ena Point also boasts two more species of breeding seabirds, as well as occasional views of humpback whales, Hawaiian monk seals, pods of spinner dolphins, and threatened green sea turtles.

Ka'ena Point is also an extraordinary resource because it is the best example in the main Hawaiian Islands of the type of ecosystem that can be found in Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The difference is that anyone on O'ahu can drive to Ka'ena Point to see this spectacular display of plants and animals.

People have been a part of Ka'ena Point for generations. Many trace their ancestors to this special place. Within the reserve is leina ka 'uhane (Spirit Leap), which is considered to be a wahi pana, a celebrated legendary place. Early Hawaiians used Ka'ena Point for fishing and feather collecting. Today, people of various cultures visit Ka'ena Point for fishing, hiking, bicycling, and other recreational and educational activities.

Ka'ena Point is a very special place to see. If you do decide to visit the point please remember to stay on marked trails, pack out trash, observe wildlife respectfully from a distance, and that NO DOGS are allowed in the reserve. Following these rules will help maintain the efforts to restore Ka'ena Point.

For further information please contact the DLNR Division of Forestry and Wildlife, Room 325, 1151 Punchbowl St. Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813, phone (808) 587-0016.

Upcoming Field Trips

Saturday July 14

Hilton Hawaiian Village Bird Tour

Meet at 10:00 am at the PENGUINS to tour the beautiful grounds with many aquatic birds and 10 fresh water ponds. Limit 15 people. Please sign up with Alice Roberts at 864-8122 or mermaidshi@aol.com.

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Meet at 9:30am on Kuli'ou'ou Road at the water's edge for a guided tour of the birds and their habitat. Please sign up with Alice Roberts at 864-8122 or mermaidshi@aol.com.

Birds are back at Freeman Seabird Preserve

By Wendy Johnson, Executive Director

Beginning in mid-March, Wedge-tailed Shearwaters returned to the Hawaii Audubon Society's Freeman Seabird Preserve after spending several months foraging in the eastern Pacific Ocean. The nesting colony at Black Point on Oahu quickly became a center of mating, burrowing, socializing and vocalizing activities in preparation for egg-laying during the month of June. This year, it appears that more shearwaters are choosing to nest in the man-made habitat sites at FSP than have previously done so. Thanks to the efforts of both professional landscapers and bands of dedicated volunteers, native vegetation now shades many of these sites on the upper, flat portion of the Preserve.

An annual, colony-wide census will be conducted on July 14, as it has been each year since 2009, with weekly monitoring of hatching rates, chick growth and fledging success continuing through the month of November. By mid-December the last of the Wedge-tailed Shearwater chicks will have departed again for the sea.

Private donations continue to be critical to the success of the Freeman Seabird Preserve. Dedicated supporters have



Photo by Wendy Johnson

helped to fund ongoing needs including native plants, habitat restoration, predator control and educational materials. This season we plan to increase photographic monitoring of nesting and potential predator activities and hope to be able to fund additional outreach for students and community members.

Summertime at Paiko Lagoon Wildlife Sanctuary

Low-Tide Reef-Walk: Saturday, June 2, 2012, 7-9:30 am

by Alice P S Roberts

As we arrived, we interacted with the ducks at the neighborhood church. As usual, they greeted us on Kuli'ou'ou Road; male and female mixed Mallard types, and even some with white Easter (Pekin) duck features. I think I heard some ducklings in the bushes. We didn't see any of the blackish Muscovy ducks we've seen before, which are really not black at all. When you look closely, you can see their feathers are beautifully iridescent dark green and blue. I wonder if they were poached?

As we started walking around the lagoon, we saw several Milo blossoms; today's were yellow and yesterday's were orange-red. The Ironwood had lots of reddish, fluffy male and green female inflorescences. Many of the recently planted native flora are doing better: 'Ākulikuli, with the bright pink star-flowers, and the endemic, Naio (false sandalwood). Some naturally occurring native plants were seen too: 'Aki'aki (grass) and Kīpūkai, with its blue-gray hairy leaves. Invasive pickleweed was seen everywhere.

It was an incredibly low tide at -0.5 feet! I was surprised we didn't see many fish or crabs, and we found no solar slugs. We threw many clumps of leathery mudweed and gorilla ogo (both are invasive seaweeds) up above the high tide line to dry out and die.

As expected, we did not see any migratory shorebirds. In past summers there have been some left behind when the others depart. We did see more urban birds than on our last trip in April: Common Mynas, many finches, Zebra Doves, Red-vented Bulbuls, Red-crested Cardinals, and the nearby resident's macaw called more often, and more loudly, than usual.

Wondrously we watched two Great Frigatebirds ('Iwa, *Fregata minor palmerstoni*), but could not identify their sexes. They just looked black against the bright blue sky – I doubt that they were both males, since in the past we have seen a female soaring above us.

We did see several White Terns (Manu-O-Kū, *Gygis alba*) acrobatically flying in pairs or small groups of three or four. Of course, we saw many Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) with their s-shaped necks and legs out behind, flap-flying east and west. Some even flew over us for closer inspection.

I think most of us would agree that the highlights of the trip were the numerous sightings of Black-necked Stilts (*Ae'ō, Himantopus mexicanus knudseni*). We hadn't seen any in April, but I had counted some for the CBC in December. We saw them flying, landing, feeding, preening, and taking off. As in the past, a couple "yelled" at us and flew over at close range, trailing their pinkish-red legs behind them.

As a fitting finale, a juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron (*Auku'u, Nycticorax nycticorax hoactli*) flew in and settled down to fish in the pond. It could have been the same one we saw in April.

As we returned to our starting point, we collected several bags of trash from the area. Those that have been to Paikō Lagoon with me before will know what it means that we found no "sand balls", but we did find some "tongues" this time! Keep the secrets for those who might go to Paikō for their first visit with us on Saturday, September 1, 2012. We'll meet as usual on Kuli'ou'ou Road at the water's edge at 9:30 am.

Mystery Seabird May Not be Extinct

New Evidence Indicates Tiny Population of Bryan's Shearwater May Exist

By Robert Johns, Smithsonian Institute

MEDIA RELEASE (Washington, D.C., February 16, 2012)

A bird species known only from two records and thought possibly to be extinct is again making news. Scientists have announced that they have evidence, found in the last decade, but only recently confirmed, of small numbers of Bryan's Shearwaters on islands in Japan.

The seabird was announced in 2011 as a new species and represented the first new bird species found in the United States in 37 years. It occurred thanks to a sharp-eyed scientist, Dr. Peter Pyle at the Institute for Bird Populations (IBP), who realized that the specimen lying in a museum drawer for over 50 years and which was collected on Midway Atoll in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands in 1963 had been misidentified. He noted differences in measurements and physical appearance compared to other similar species—observations that were later confirmed by DNA analysis. As a result of his findings, the bird was given the name Bryan's Shearwater, *Puffinus bryani*.

At that time, it was feared by some that Bryan's Shearwater might be one of those cases where a bird is discovered after already having gone extinct. Fortunately, that now appears likely not to be the case. It was reported at the 39th Annual Meeting of the Pacific Seabird Group, held on Oahu, Hawai'i this month, that researchers from the Forestry and Forest Products Research Institute in Tsukuba, Japan have found six specimens of the species between 1997 and 2011 on the Ogasawara (Bonin) Islands, about 620 miles south of Tokyo. DNA testing recently confirmed the scientist's suspicions that these birds were Bryan's Shearwaters. Five of the six specimens were carcasses while the sixth was a live bird that died after several months of attempted rehabilitation.

"When I found out about these records I was ecstatic," says Pyle. "Not only does it indicate that Bryan's Shearwaters still survives but it suggests where they might breed, the first step to conserving what must be a highly endangered species."



The next step for scientists is to locate breeding colonies on the Japanese islands, and to begin taking steps to eradicate rats there. Three of the six specimens showed evidence of rat predation.

"Non-native rats pose a serious threat to island birds, often preying upon eggs and young. The science of rodent eradication has advanced dramatically in the past few years, and has been quite successfully employed in many places, such as Midway Atoll and the aptly named Rat Island in the Aleutians," said Dr. George Wallace, Vice President for Oceans and Islands at American Bird Conservancy, the leading bird conservation organization in the United States.

Listening devices have also been installed on Midway Atoll where the bird was once seen and on two of the islands in the Bonins where carcasses were found, in hopes of taping the bird's call.

Researchers rarely discover new species of birds; most of the world's 9,000-plus species (including about 21 other species of shearwaters) were described before 1900. The majority of new species described since the mid-1900s have been discovered in remote tropical rain and cloud forests, primarily in South America and southeastern Asia. The Bryan's Shearwater is the first new species to be described from the United States since the Poouli was discovered in the forests of Maui in 1974 and is now extinct.

The 10-inch long Bryan's Shearwater is the smallest shearwater known. It is black and white with a black or blue-gray bill and blue legs. It is named after Edwin Horace Bryan, Jr., who was curator of collections at the B.P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu from 1919 until 1968.

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- . Food . Entertainment .
- . Silent Auction .
- . Freeman Seabird Preserve Update .
- . Adopt-a-Shearwater .



Come to my Soiree!

A fundraiser to support Hawaii Audubon Society's Mission.

2nd Annual Shearwater Soiree

Join the Hawai'i Audubon Society for a night of music, pupus, and fun-draising on Thursday, July 12th at thirtyninehotel (39 Hotel St.) in the heart of downtown Honolulu from 5:30 to 9:00pm.

A silent auction full of great items will be held throughout the evening, along with an update of the Freeman Seabird Preserve and the Adopt-A-Shearwater campaign.

Tickets are \$15 in advance and \$20 at the door. Food, entertainment, and fun are included in the ticket price. All proceeds will support the Hawaii Audubon Society and the Freeman Seabird Preserve.

For more information or to purchase tickets please visit www.hawaiiaudubon.com, call 808-528-1432, or email hiaudsoc@pixi.com.

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2nd Annual Shearwater Soiree

A fundraiser to support the Hawai'i Audubon Society and the Freeman Seabird Preserve at thirtyninehotel (39 Hotel St.) from 5:30-9:00pm. Tickets include pupus, music, a silent auction, and updates on the Freeman Seabird Preserve. \$15 in advance or \$20 at the door. Please purchase tickets at www.hawaiiudubon.com or call 808-528-1432.

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