



Hawai'i's First Wildlife Biologist: James Donald Smith

By Arleone Dibben-Young

Hawai'i's Territorial Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry hired James Donald Smith in 1948, as the Division of Fish and Game's (HDFG) first wildlife biologist (Banko and Elder 1990), specifically because of his experience and ability to conduct aerial surveys and expertise on waterfowl and game birds (Breese pers. comm.). Within a year, Smith initiated the first official bird banding project in Hawai'i, an annual waterfowl count (HDFG 1952), and the Nēnē Restoration Project. Over the next two years, he conducted the first ecological study of the nēnē (Hawaiian Goose, *Branta sandvicensis*) and ran an intense publicity campaign to increase awareness of the nēnē and ask public assistance in reporting sightings (Smith 1952).

James Donald Smith was born 18 April 1914, in St. Paul, Minnesota, and graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1938, with a B.S. degree in wildlife management. Passionate about waterfowl, he worked from 1937 to 1948 as a game biologist for the Division of Game and Fish, Minnesota Department of Conservation, during which time he studied the canvasback duck (*Aythya valisineria*) (Smith 1946). Smith filled the newly created position (Territory of Hawai'i 1945) in July 1948, but his tenure was relatively short-lived, resigning in October 1952 (Honolulu Advertiser 1952c. Honolulu Star Bulletin 1952d), to take a position as wildlife management biologist/pilot for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in Minnesota. In 1962, Smith was promoted to Chief, Branch of Management, Division of Management and Enforcement and relocated to Washington, D.C., where he remained until his untimely death in 1967 (C.D. Smith pers. comm. Studholme 1967).

Nēnē Restoration Project

Although Smith (1952) credited the Territorial Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry with establishing the Nēnē Restoration Project at Pōhakuloa, Hawai'i Island (later named Pōhakuloa Endangered Species Facility), the plan was conceived by Vernon E. Brock (Director HDFG),

Smith, and Paul L. Breese (Director Honolulu Zoo, Chair Nēnē Advisory Committee) (Breese pers. comm.). The Civilian Conservation Corps base camp for the grading of the Saddle Road in 1943, was chosen because it had a landing strip and the road had been recently paved. Funding was not immediately available for improvements, so Breese and Smith went about assembling two breeding enclosures with 'found' materials: Structural posts were made of 'ōhi'a (*Metrosideros polymorpha*) logs salvaged from the grading of a nearby 4-wheel-drive road, three-foot-long battens from discarded WWII ammunition boxes were used to construct a site barrier between enclosures, and Breese loaned wire mesh from several dismantled 1920s-era zoo aviaries. Breese, Brock and Smith met with Herbert C. Shipman and asked for the loan of four nēnē, assuring him that the new project would succeed and was unlike the earlier failed Mōkapu Game Bird Farm for which Shipman had provided nēnē. In August 1949 (Smith 1952), four cardboard boxes – each containing a nēnē – were picked up by Breese and Brock (Breese pers. comm.), thus launching the Nēnē Restoration



Project.

Migratory waterfowl banding project

The HDFG was issued banding permit 6717 on 25 October 1949 (Bystrak to Dibben-Young email 14 September 2009), and Smith immediately utilized Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act funds to begin the territory's first official banding project. The primary objective was to determine if waterfowl wintering in Hawai'i were sporadic visitors or regular migrants (Honolulu Advertiser 1949a. Honolulu Star Bulletin 1949). If found to return, then the territory's duck hunting season, which was closed 1 December 1941 (Honolulu Star Bulletin 1941), would not be reopened.

Smith deployed traps at Kailua's Ka'elepulu Pond (Breese pers. comm.), Nu'upia Pond at Kāne'ōhe Naval Air Base (Honolulu Advertiser 1949b), and Joseph S. Medeiros at Kanahā Pond on Maui, resulting in the banding of 121 ducks

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and nine coots (USFWS Banding schedules 1949-1950). The majority of the waterfowl were captured at Kanahā Pond: 85 Northern Pintails and one Green-winged Teal (Maui News 1951). No trapping was conducted during the 1950-1951 winter season due to four consecutive months of fierce southerly 'Kona' storms (HDFG 1952). The project's first recovery was a Northern Pintail banded at Kanahā Pond 1 January 1950, and shot 10 November 1951, at Mount Eden, California (Honolulu Advertiser 1952b. Maui News 1952a). A Northern Pintail banded 1 January 1950, at Kanahā Pond, was recaptured at the banding site 26 November 1952, and became the first returnee (USGS Bird Banding Lab database queried 11 September 2009).

Smith and Medeiros banded 420 ducks at Kanahā Pond during the 1951-1952 winter season (Maui News 1952b), making a total of more than 600 birds banded for the two seasons (Honolulu Advertiser 1952b. Maui News 1952a. USFWS banding schedules 1949-1952). Smith resigned at the end of October (Honolulu Advertiser 1952c. Honolulu Star Bulletin 1952d), and Medeiros continued the banding program without interruption, publishing the results of their efforts in 1958 (Medeiros). The recoveries of 172 Northern Pintails – seven in Hawai'i – through 1956, resulted in permanent closure of Hawai'i's duck hunting season.

Annual waterfowl survey

Smith began annual waterfowl surveys in January 1950 to determine coot populations, numbers of wintering migratory waterfowl, and utilization of wetlands (HDFG 1952). Ground surveys were conducted on Hawai'i and Maui, and from Smith's Stinson L-5 Sentinel airplane in areas inconveniently located (Kaua'i 1950, Moloka'i and O'ahu 1950-1952), with Medeiros as second observer. Surveys were made at one-hundred-foot elevation flying at 65 mph (HDFG 1952), only twenty miles per hour over stall speed (Gray to Dibben-Young email 25 October 2008). Aerial surveys continued after Smith's resignation but were eliminated when game wardens and a new wildlife biologist were trained to conduct ground censuses in January 1955. Smith's annual waterfowl count continues today as the Hawai'i Division of Forestry and Wildlife biannual statewide waterbird survey.

Inter-island commutes

Smith lived on a peninsula on Kāne'ohe Bay and commuted frequently in his airplane to Maui and Pōhakuoa from Kailua Sky Ranch¹ (USDA SCS 1972), a privately-owned grass landing strip on the Mōkapu peninsula. On 21 January 1952, Smith was on his way to Pōhakuoa when he encountered bad weather and returned to Kahului, Maui. He took off for Kailua with clear conditions, however, poor visibility was met over Moloka'i's Kalaupapa peninsula so Smith climbed to 7,000 feet to fly above the clouds. By the time he reached a hole in the clouds his destination had been over-shot so far that no land was in sight and while returning to the Mōkapu airfield the plane ran out of gas. He ditched in the ocean and was adrift in 50 mph winds (Honolulu Star Bulletin 1952c). Smith spent 19 hours in a leaky shark-bitten life raft (Breese pers. comm.) before rescue by the USS Gurke naval destroyer (Honolulu Advertiser 1952a), 95 miles

northeast of Koko Head (Honolulu Star Bulletin 1952a). With Smith having logged over 1,000 hours in the air (Honolulu Star Bulletin 1952b), his wife Therese announced "He has flown his last flight" (Honolulu Star Bulletin 1952a).

An enduring legacy

Smith earned his private pilot's license in Minnesota in 1948, by 1950 obtained his commercial rating, his commercial helicopter license in 1965, and in 1967 his license as a helicopter instructor. He advocated the use of aircraft for waterfowl research and surveys, and annually flew migratory flyways² across the continent from Canada to Mexico, accumulating thousands of hours. James Donald Smith and fellow wildlife biologist Robert A. Uppgren were killed 12 May 1967, while conducting an aerial waterfowl survey near Leech Lake, Minnesota (Sasse 2003. Studholme 1967). The Hughes 269B helicopter Smith was piloting suffered engine flameout and complete power loss due to inadequate maintenance (NTSB 1967) by the company that sold the aircraft to USFWS (U.S. District Court 1971). Although his time in Hawai'i was brief, Smith made a remarkable and substantial impact that continues to span decades – a tribute to his perseverance and foresight for Hawai'i's native avifauna and tireless dedication to migratory waterfowl.

Note

The Territory's first biologist was Vernon E. Brock, a fish biologist hired in 1944 to head the Hawai'i Territorial Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry Department of Fish and Game. Up until then the position was strictly administrative and with no necessity for specialized individuals with an education in biology. The position was offered to Brock by the Board's president Colin G. Lennox because Brock's appointment was in line with the Board's policy for great postwar expansion of the Hawaiian commercial and sport fishing industries and the Territory's focus at the time was to encourage the sports of hunting and fishing for both local residents and tourists. Brock, a graduate of Stanford University, was wooed away from his position as California's fishery administrator and quickly became well known for both his field research and marine introductions in the Hawaiian Islands. With birdlife also falling under his purview,



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it was during the Schwartz's February 1946 through July 1947 survey of Hawaiian avifauna (Schwartz and Schwartz 1949) that Brock recommended the Board create a new position for a waterfowl and game bird expert to address issues - mostly hunting related - in the Schwartz's report, thus Smith was hired as the Territory's first wildlife biologist.

Acknowledgements

Mahalo! to Paul L. Breese, Timothy A. Burr, Danny Bystrak (U.S. Geological Service Bird Banding Lab, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center), Richard A. Coleman, Mike Goos (District Manager, Audubon NWR), Leslie Ann Kawamoto (Honolulu Advertiser), Terri Kojima (Navy Region Hawai'i Public Affairs), Joseph S. Medeiros, James H. Gray (Stinson Owners and Pilots Association), and Donald Craig Smith, James L. Smith, Judith A. (Smith) Whitaker, and William D. Smith for reviewing this manuscript about their father.

1. The grass landing strip of Kailua Sky Ranch lies beneath a row of houses on the north side of 'Aikahi Loop adjacent and parallel to the south property line of Marine Corps Air Station Kāne'ōhe.
2. In 1967, the J. Donald Smith Memorial Marsh was dedicated on the Central Flyway at the Allen Waterfowl Production Area, Audubon NWR Complex, Sheridan County, North Dakota (Mike Goos pers. comm.).

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_____. 7 May 1950. Fish and Game survey-2,000 migratory birds spent winter in Hawai'i. p. 8:2.

_____. 23 January 1952a. Rescued pilot tells of 19 hours on raft. p. 1:1, 8:1.

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_____. 23 January 1952b. 'Human error' blamed by pilot who ditched plane off island. p. 1:7.

_____. 24 January 1952c. Wind blew him off course and out to sea, Smith says. p. 1:1.

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Correction: The photo on page 38 of the Sept/Oct 'Elepaio was published incorrectly. This is the correct photo of a Millerbird posing the morning after release on Laysan. Photo by R. Kohley

Ronald L. Walker 1932-2012

Ron Walker passed away on September 30, and he is sorely missed. Ron was a Life Member of the Hawaii Audubon Society, past President, and long-time volunteer, and member of the Board of Directors. Ron's contributions to the Society and its mission were extraordinary; ranging from chain-saw operations to research, writing and drawing. Ron designed the HAS logo featuring the 'Elepaio, the native bird which shares its name with this publication. The January/February 2013 issue will feature a tribute to Ron and his legacy.

Members who would like to share memories or stories about Ron are invited to send them to the HAS office at 850 Richards St., Suite 505, Honolulu, HI 96813. They will be posted on our website and selected submissions will be published in the 'Elepaio, with the authors' permission.

A generous donation has been received by the Society for the purpose of establishing a Ron Walker Memorial Fund in support of HAS activities and programs.

Colony-Wide Census at Freeman Seabird Preserve 9/14/12

By Wendy Johnson, HAS Executive Director

The fifth annual colony-wide count of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters nesting at the Hawaii Audubon Society's Freeman Seabird Preserve (FSP) at Black Point, Oahu was conducted on September 14. Dr. David Hyrenbach of HPU led a team of eight graduate students, volunteers and donors who quietly searched in bushes, burrows, shaded areas and rock formations in an effort to spot each of the little gray fluffy chicks who were waiting for adult birds to return from the sea to feed them. The process is recorded in an entertaining one-and-a-half minute video compiled from a series of time-lapse photographs taken that day. The video can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/49517415?action=share#>.

The counting process revealed 137 chicks, the largest number observed on the one-acre Preserve since 2008, when monitoring began at this unique colony on Oahu's south shore. The Wedge-tailed Shearwaters laid their eggs in June, and all of the chicks had hatched by the end of August. A comprehensive, active nest count on July 14 resulted in 182 nests with birds sitting on eggs or unattended eggs, so approximately 45 eggs (or chicks) were either abandoned, infertile, damaged, lost or predated between mid-July and mid-September. Predator control and monitoring are ongoing at FSP during the months the birds are in residence, from March until the last chick leaves in December.

A subset of 34 chicks is monitored more closely, via weekly checks and weighing conducted by Dr. Hyrenbach and



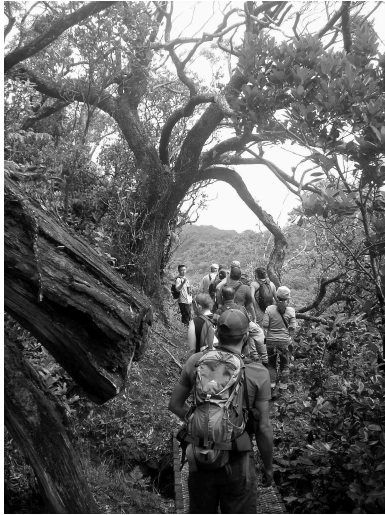
Photo by Sarah Youngren

his graduate students. These growth and survivorship studies provide information of the state of the colony, and also correlate to oceanographic and fisheries conditions which influence the survival and breeding success of all seabirds. In an effort to discover more about Wedge-tailed Shearwater feeding activities, Dr. Hyrenbach deployed nine time-depth recorders on breeding shearwaters at FSP in August. The recorder data indicated that every bird (8 tags retrieved) dove deeper than one meter to feed at sea, with one bird executing a 14 second dive to a depth of 9.3 meters.

Poamoho Trail Field Trip Report

October 14, 2012
By Lance Tanino

Fifteen dedicated participants successfully completed the field trip to Poamoho Trail in the central Ko'olau Mountains on O'ahu. It had been 28 years (11 March 1984) since the last Hawai'i Audubon Society field trip to this breathe-taking mountain ridge ('Elepaio 44:12).



Despite the ominous dark and heavy clouds and rainy morning in Honolulu, we stayed focused on our game plan to complete our scheduled hike to this special trail. Thanks to Hawai'i Audubon Society's Coordinator, Meagan Rathjen, for getting the required permit from Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Forestry and Wildlife and the owners of 4x4 vehicles for helping make this trip possible.

We carpoled from Punchbowl Street next to the State Library at 7:30 a.m. and headed to Poamoho Hele Loa Access Road near Dole Plantation in Wahiawa. On our way up the dirt road towards Poamoho Trailhead, we passed through pineapple fields, tree groves (Kukui/Candlenut, *Aleurites moluccana*, Albizia/Silktree/Mimosa, and Albizia spp.), introduced grasslands, Eucalyptus forests, and eventually native rainforest. The bird species encountered along the access road included Gray Francolin, Spotted Dove, Zebra Dove, Red-vented and Red-whiskered Bulbul, Common Myna, House Finch, Common Waxbill, and Java Sparrow.

After a brief introduction, including a historical perspective by lifetime member and former President of Hawaii Audubon Society, Michael Ord; he also warned us that most birds occur in the parking area (he was right); the rest of us set forth on the trail.

Division of Forestry and Wildlife deserve accolades for maintaining a beautiful trail. The first two-thirds of the trail were relatively easy, however, the last third was a bit more

challenging with very narrow paths and much more muddy conditions. Many areas along the trail provided extraordinary views of the ohia-koa forest. It was refreshing not seeing a single Kukui or Albizia tree, but instead being in awe of the many Loulu Palms scattered throughout the area, a native palm species that was once very common in the lowlands of O'ahu. The diversity of native vegetation along the trail was very impressive. Although we didn't get to see many birds (not surprising since nesting season is over), we heard 'Apapane frequently calling, and a few songs were heard. Surprisingly, very few O'ahu 'Amakihi were heard or seen (several of them were heard later in the day, in the parking area, where Michael was waiting for them). Japanese White-Eyes were relatively common from the trail head to the summit. Very few White-rumped Shama and Red-billed Leiothrix were heard. Only a single Japanese Bush-Warbler made a brief chip-call.

With plans to return to Poamoho for one or two Spring hikes, more encounters with native and non-native forest birds are anticipated.

Citizen Scientists Opportunity 113th Christmas Bird Count

Spend the day with other birders and volunteers at your local bird count between December 14th and January 5th. The results are used as a guide to create conservation strategies to protect the birds and their habitat, and to understand the long-term health of bird populations.

Contact your local bird count coordinator to find out how you can join in the fun and make a difference!

Island	Date	Contact
Oahu: Honolulu	Dec 15	Pete Donaldson pdnldsn.bird@mac.com
Oahu: Waipio	Jan 5	David Bremer bremerd001@hawaii.rr.com
Lanai	Dec 17	Sonny Gamponia sgamponia@yahoo.com
Molokai	Dec 20	Arleone Dibben-Young nene@aloha.net
Maui: Kealia Pond NWR	Dec 20	Sonny Gamponia sgamponia@yahoo.com
Maui: Hosmer's Grove	Dec 27	Sonny Gamponia sgamponia@yahoo.com
Hawaii: Kona	Dec 20	Maile Melrose melloke@hawaii.rr.com
Hawaii: Volcano	TBA	Eldridge Naboa eldridge.naboa@gmail.com
Kauai: Waimea	Dec 22	Michele Hookano kokeemuseum@earthlink.net
Kauai: Kapaa	Dec 16	Megan Dalton meganemilydalton@yahoo.com

Freeman Seabird Preserve Fieldwork Opportunity

Volunteers needed for habitat restoration
Saturday mornings January through March 2013
9am to Noon

In November and early December, Wedge-tailed Shearwater adult birds and chicks leave the Freeman Seabird Preserve at Black Point to forage at sea for several months before returning in the latter part of March to nest. Volunteers are needed for fieldwork at the site on Saturday mornings from 9 am to noon beginning January 7. Activities will include maintenance of native plants and man-made landscape features, along with removal of invasive plants, trash and debris.

Other dates and times can be arranged for groups wishing to contribute their time in an effort to preserve rare Hawaiian coastal vegetation and seabird nesting habitat.

Please contact the Hawaii Audubon Society office by phone or e-mail in advance if you would like to participate. We will meet each Saturday at Triangle Park near Diamond Head at 8:45am to carpool to the site. Plan on bringing drinking water, sun and rain protection, gloves, weeding tools, clippers and loppers.



Upcoming Field Trips and Volunteer Opportunities

O'ahu:

Manoa Cliff Trail Restoration Work Day **Sunday November 4th from 9am to 1pm**

Learn about native birds, plants, and other wildlife, while hiking 1.5 miles to the restoration area. Then help remove invasive plants and replace them with native species. Bring water, food, raingear, warm layers, sturdy footwear, and tools if you have them. For directions and to RSVP, email Meagan at hiaudsoc@pixi.com or call 808-528-1432.

Educational Kayaking Field Trip to Mokolua Islets **Saturday November 10th from 8:15am to 1:30pm**

(NOTE: Trip is full, but look for another trip in February.)
Kayak from Kailua Beach to the Mokolua Islets Seabird Sanctuary to discover the importance of Oahu's offshore islets, which seabirds nest there, the threats they face, and why nesting seabirds are so important to terrestrial systems. We will swim in tide pools, and do a beach cleanup. For details and to RSVP, email Meagan at hiaudsoc@pixi.com or call 808-528-1432.

Envelope Stuffing Day **Sunday November 11th starting at 9am**

Enjoy free pizza and help stuff over 1,500 envelopes at our office in downtown Honolulu. Each year the Hawaii Audubon Society sends out an annual appeal letter, membership renewal form, and the Board of Directors election ballot to all of our members. Email Meagan at hiaudsoc@pixi.com or call 528-1432 to sign-up.

Office, Outreach, & Education Volunteers Needed

We have long-term and short-term opportunities. Please email Meagan at hiaudsoc@pixi.com for details.

James Campbell National Wildlife Refuge Birding Tour

Saturday November 17th, 3:30pm
Saturday December 1st, 9am

Join us on a walking tour through wetlands and explore the last remaining intact coastal dune system on O'ahu. See endangered Hawaiian birds, migratory shorebirds, and waterfowl. Bring binoculars, water, and wear comfortable shoes. Please RSVP as space is limited to Meagan at hiaudsoc@pixi.com or call 808-528-1432.

Paikō Lagoon Tour: Night Low-tide Reef Walk **Saturday, December 8th at 5:30pm**

Ever wonder what happens in the ocean at night? Take a guided tour through Paikō Lagoon to see waterfowl and bioluminescent bobtail squid! Bring flashlights and contact Alice at 864-8122 or mermaidshi@aol.com to RSVP and for directions.

Urban Bird Identification Workshop **Sunday December 9th at 8:00am**

Do you want to help with the Christmas Bird Count, but feel you're not ready? Improve your birding skills with Mike Ord and Pete Donaldson as they teach you how to identify urban birds in Kapiolani Park using sight and sound. Then help count urban birds on December 15th! RSVP to Meagan at hiaudsoc@pixi.com or call 808-528-1432.

Volunteer Field Trip Leaders Needed on All Islands

Please email Meagan at hiaudsoc@pixi.com or call 528-1432 if you are interested in being a volunteer to help organize and guide field trips on *all Islands* dealing with Hawaii's birds, conservation, and/or habitat restoration. Please email Meagan at hiaudsoc@pixi.com if you are interested in volunteering.

Hawaii Audubon Society Annual Awards Dinner & Members Meeting

Monday, December 3rd 2012
6:00pm to 9:00pm

at EAT HONOLULU

Gentry Pacific Design Center, 560 North Nimitz Hwy
(between K-mart and City Mill, plenty of parking available)

Join us for a wonderful evening of food, friends, and education.
Learn about our accomplishments, goals, and new programs,
prepare for the Christmas Bird Count,
& listen to our featured speakers:

Lindsay Young and Eric Vanderwerf
from Pacific Rim Conservation

**“A story of predation, eradication & recovery
at one of Oahu’s largest seabird colonies:
Ka’ena Point Natural Area Reserve”**

Tickets are \$25 per person
RSVP Required

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

Thank you for your support, we look forward to seeing you there!

Hawaii Audubon Society Board of Directors 2013 Nominees

New nominees to be elected for a one-year term: Catherine Pligavko, Diana King, Mary Roney, Rachel Fukumoto, Talia Starkey, Wendy Johnson

Returning board members to be elected for a two-year term: Phil Bruner and Thorne Abbott

Returning board members serving their second year of a two-year term:
Kristen Mailheau, Landin Johnson, Laura Sheehan, Linda Paul, Melissa Kolonie, Melissa Sprecher

Please mail in additional nominees with their written consent by November 10th.

Ballots, membership renewal, and donation forms will be mailed to members in Mid-November. Please promptly return these to:

Hawai‘i Audubon Society
850 Richards St., Suite 505
Honolulu, HI 96813

Election results will be announced at the Annual Awards Dinner & Meeting on December 3rd.

Hawai‘i Audubon Society Membership/Donation Form

- \$25 Regular Member
 \$15 Student Member
 \$40 Family Membership
 \$100 Supporting Member

- International Membership:
 \$28 Canada & Mexico
 \$33 Other

\$_____ Donation

Donations are tax-deductible and greatly appreciated.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

- E-mail me the ‘Elepaio Mail me the ‘Elepaio E-mail me volunteer opportunities, updates, & field trips.

Thank you for your concern and commitment to protecting Hawaii's native wildlife and ecosystems.

Pay by credit/debit card at www.hawaiiadubon.com/members.

Please make checks payable to **Hawai‘i Audubon Society**

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Calendar of Events

- Sunday November 4th, 9am-1pm
Manoa Cliff Trail Restoration Work Day
- Saturday November 10th, 8:15am-1:30pm
Educational Kayaking Field Trip to Mokulua Islets
- Sunday November 11th starting at 9am
Envelope Stuffing Day (Free Pizza!)
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Saturday December 1st, 9am
James Campbell National Wildlife Refuge Tours
- Monday December 3rd, 6pm-9pm
Hawaii Audubon Society's Annual Meeting & Awards
Dinner
- Saturday December 8th, 5:30pm
Paikō Lagoon Tour: Night Low-tide Reef Walk
- Sunday December 9th, 8:00am
Urban Bird Identification Workshop, Kapiolani Park

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