

# 'ELEPAIO

Journal of the  
Hawaii Audubon Society



For the Protection of  
Hawaii's Native Wildlife

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## A RECENT SIGHTING OF THE 'AKIAPOL'AU IN SOUTH KONA, HAWAII

by Howard F. Sakai and C. John Ralph

Since the late 1800's, virtually the only populations reported in the literature of the 'Akiapola'au (*Hemignathus wilsoni*), an endangered species, have been those sighted on the eastern and southern sides of the island of Hawaii (Berger 1972). Formerly, the species was observed in the native forest of Kona, on the western side of the Island. Perkins (1903) stated that, in the middle Kona district, the 'Akiapola'au were numerous in the forests of mixed koa, mamane and naio at elevations of 1000 m and higher. Wilson and Evans (1890-99), however, found the bird ". . . decidedly rare, and I (Wilson) obtained only three specimens during a stay of some 5 weeks in Kona. . .". To the best of our knowledge, no further observations of this species were made until 1956.

David H. Woodside reported to us (pers. comm.) a previously unpublished sighting he made in South Kona in October, 1956 of a bird north of Keanapaakai, near the upper edge of the Honaunau Forest Reserve, on Mauna Kea. He observed the bird at a distance of about 15 m, actively pecking about 5 m up in a mature koa tree, and identified it as an 'Akiapola'au.

Van Riper (1973) reported two observations of this species on the western side of the Island. One sighting, in the Kohala Mountains, he no longer considers valid (van Riper, pers. comm.). Another was observed and photographed on August 11, 1971 "1.5 mi. SE of the Moanua (Moanuaiahea) Radio Relay Station" on Mt. Hualalai in North Kona at 1700-m elevation.

It is, therefore, more than 20 years since Woodside's observation of the species in South Kona, 15 years between the Woodside and van Riper sightings, and 7 years since the van Riper observation in North Kona.

On April 17, 1978, the senior author sighted two 'Akiapola'au about 2 km west of Hooper Camp, South Kona, while searching for active Hawaiian Crow nests with Jon Giffin, Hawaii State wildlife biologist. At about 1525-m elevation, an 'Akiapola'au was heard sound the juvenile "chipping" call. This young bird, in our judgement probably less than two months old, was with an adult female. The female is distinguished from the male by her somewhat duller plumage and lighter eye stripe. Both birds were observed for about a minute at a distance of 14 m. They were perched on a dead koa branch 10 m up a 17-m koa tree. The female was probing and pecking at the bark, with her long decurved upper mandible thrown back in the manner typical of the species, using only the lower mandible to peck. She moved from the dead branch once and foraged on a small, live koa branch covered with lichen. During the entire observation, the young bird chipped, and probed at the bark occasionally. The young bird once spread its wings and quivered them in the posture typical of a young bird begging for food. The female did not feed the young bird, or sing or call during the entire observation. No other 'Akiapola'au were heard or seen in the area.

Subsequent to this sighting, we have learned (J. M. Scott, pers. comm.) that more individuals of this species have been seen in the South Kona area of the Island of Hawaii.

It is encouraging to learn that the Kona population of this endangered species is extant and breeding, as evidenced by the

(Continued next page)



young bird. The maintenance of several viable populations in different areas will help assure survival of the species.

#### Acknowledgements

We thank Jon Giffin for field advice and help and A. Hakim, C.P. Ralph, C. van Riper, J.M. Scott, and D.H. Woodside for reviewing this manuscript.

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*Institute of Pacific Islands Forestry  
U.S. Forest Service  
1151 Punchbowl Street  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813*



An 'Akiapola'au color banded in the U.S. Forest Service endangered species research program on Keauhou Ranch, Hawaii.  
*Photo by C.J. Ralph*

## SUIT FILED OVER MAUNA KEA GRAZING

By Pat Guy  
from the Honolulu Star-Bulletin,  
Sept. 22, 1978

A suit has been filed in Circuit Court to prevent an agreement that could possibly endanger the habitat of the Palila, an endangered species of Hawaiian bird.

Filing the suit against the state Department of Land and Natural Resources, its chairman, William Thompson, and Theresa Lau is Bishop Museum zoologist Alan Ziegler and Mae E. Mull, a member of the Hawaii Audubon Society and the Sierra Club.

The suit seeks to prevent an agreement between DLNR and Lau to graze 200 head of cattle on state land within the Kaohe Game Management Area of Hamakua District on the Big Island. The purpose of the agreement is to reduce the fire hazard in the area, improve game bird habitat and stimulate the regrowth of trees, according to the suit.

But the cattle also would seriously endanger the environment of the Palila, the suit says. The Palila is known to exist only on the slopes of Mauna Kea and is dependent on the ecosystem of mamane-naio trees that also grow in this area.

This area has been designated a "critical habitat" for the Palila, and the proposed cattle grazing is within this critical area, the suit says.

Cattle grazing may pose a threat to the mamane and naio trees which would in turn pose a danger to the Palila's existence, the suit says.

It also contends no public hearings were held on the proposed agreement.

An environmental assessment by the DLNR "deals cursorily and conclusively with only a few environmental matters, and upon this inadequate basis concludes that the proposed action will have 'no significant adverse environmental effect,'" the suit says.

It requests that DLNR be required to prepare an environmental impact statement as required by state law. The area also has not been surveyed for the presence of endangered plant species, the suit says.

Ziegler, the Sierra Club and the National Audubon Society recently filed an unusual suit in U.S. District Court in which



the Palila was the plaintiff. That suit calls for the removal of sheep and goats from the bird's habitat because these animals destroy the vegetation on which the Palila depends for survival.

## LETTER TO THE 'ELEPAIO SCHOLARSHIP WINNER REPORTS

Members of the Hawaii  
Audubon Society

27 September 1978

Dear Friends:

I just wanted to tell you that the recipient of your Rose Schuster Taylor Scholarship for 1977-78 is still alive and well and grateful for your help. I have been meaning for some time to keep you up to date, but got waylaid by all sorts of demands on my time. At least now that I'm writing so belatedly I have more to tell!

After two semesters of wading through such delightful subjects as organic chemistry, I did indeed get my BA in Zoology (terrestrial). The scholarship was a great help during the school year, allowing me to devote to my studies more of the time I would otherwise have to devote to employment.

Once graduated I was hired by Haleakalā National Park as a seasonal Backcountry Ranger, and have spent the summer on patrol in the Crater. In addition to meeting the visitors and answering their questions about such things as the Crater's natural history, I was happy to be able to participate in the feral mammal and noxious plant control programs. In addition, I have been able to make observations on the nēnē and do a silversword census. Quite a valuable experience, to say the least!

Early next year the prospects look good for me to join the US Fish and Wildlife Service's forest bird census team as a transect-cutter, working on Hawai'i, Moloka'i and Lāna'i until the end of next summer. I am really excited about this job, not just because I'd get to work in some of the best native forests in the islands, but also because the goal of the project is to deter-

mine the critical habitat of Hawaii's native forest birds so that the areas most essential for their survival can be identified and carefully protected. Of course I would be deeply honored to be able to help in any way to save our native birds from oblivion!

Once this project is over, I'll go back to the University of Hawaii to get a Master's degree. At the present time it looks like a degree in Pacific and Urban Planning will be the most widely useful to me in the various political battles I'll be jumping into to try and protect some of Hawaii's unique resources from destruction. Of course it's an endless and often discouraging fight, but that's no reason not to try!

I'd like again to heartily thank you for your gracious assistance to me during one of my "starving student" years. I hope your trust in my potential will prove well-founded as the years go by.

Mahalo nui loa!

E kupa'a ke aloha  
'āina!!

Sincerely,

Ms. Dana Peterson

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## A CALL FOR OBSERVATIONS: TURTLES IN FISH STOMACHS

by George H. Balazs

Virtually nothing is known about the life of sea turtles from the time they leave their natal beaches as one-ounce hatchlings until they are first seen as juveniles, 10 lbs and larger, in shallow-water feeding pastures close to shore. This lack of information is due mostly to the fact that turtles under 10 lbs are seldom seen under natural conditions, thereby making them unavailable for scientific study. It has been reasonably assumed that smaller size turtles live for a period of time in the open ocean, away from land, where they feed at the surface on small invertebrates such as squids and crustaceans.

One method which I believe has considerable potential for gaining biological and ecological information on this little-known size category involves the indirect sampling of the turtles from the stomachs of pelagic fishes such as tuna, mahimahi, marlin and certain sharks. These fishes could be expected to periodically eat small turtles. The recovery of whole small turtles or turtle parts from the stomachs of such predators is therefore entirely possible, provided that the person conducting the examination is alerted to the importance of such a finding.

If an HAS member or friend should find a turtle or turtle part in the stomach of a fish, I would greatly appreciate it if he would contact me on Oahu at 247-6631. Phone collect if you are on an outer island. If I am not in my office when you call, please leave your name and number with our secretary, and I will contact you at the earliest opportunity. After learning of your discovery by telephone, I would like to pick up the recovered material and transfer it to our laboratory for detailed study.

Thank you in advance for any assistance that you can provide to this research project.

*Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology  
P. O. Box 1346  
Kaneohe, Hawaii 96744*

## WAAHILA STATE PARK - WOODLAWN HIKE

On August 13, a group of Hawaii Audubon members lead by Maile Stemmerman, did the Waahila State Park - Woodlawn trail in search of native birdlife. After a few errors in finding the park, we finally

departed on our hike into the mountains before 8:30. Perhaps next time there should be maps included in the up-coming 'Elepaio issues, showing exactly how to reach the prospective destinations?

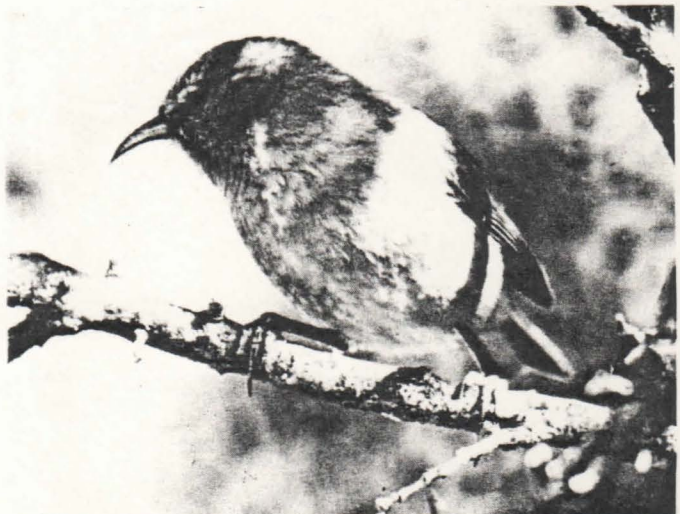
Mr. Joe Quinn, President of a Texas Audubon Society, from El Paso, joined the group and was rewarded by seeing some of our unique flora and fauna.

The day was beautiful, as was the trail, and Maile showed us some of the plant life and calls of the 'Elepaio.

White-eyes were the most abundant bird, as usual, but our list held some interesting species. Those included one Red-vented Bulbul, one Shama seen and perhaps five heard. We also saw several Spotted Munia or Ricebirds, Cardinals, Spotted Doves, and Barred Doves. But the most outstanding observations were four Oahu 'Amakihi seen and twelve to fifteen heard, one 'Apapane seen and three to five heard, one immature 'Elepaio seen and two heard. In the back of Manoa Valley, two White-tailed Tropicbirds were flying around in graceful splendor.

The 'ohi'a-lehua had little blossom, but on one occasion a male and female 'Amakihi were feeding from a tree soon to be in full bloom. This was perhaps the best drepanid sighting for the group, for we were up close to the tree and had the birds in good view. We also had the opportunity to smell the musty sweet scent of a honeycreeper up wind of us, adding a flavor of extra spice to the already seasoned trip.

*Mark Thomas*



'Amakihi

*Photo by R.J. Shallenberger*



## DEATH SENTENCE FOR NATIVE BIRDS?

By Helen Shiras Baldwin

(from the Hawaii Tribune-Herald)

The plan to permit hundreds, perhaps thousands, of acres of native forest to be at least partially cleared and planted to exotic wood-chip trees will virtually pronounce a death sentence on several already rare species of native Hawaiian forest birds.

Some of these birds live almost exclusively in the upper parts of large old koa and 'ohi'a trees--birds such as the once abundant 'O'u claimed to be the sweetest singer among native birds; the 'Akepa, flitting like a bit of flame among the tree tops; the 'Akiapola'au, which acts somewhat like a woodpecker, hammering off bits of old bark with its lower mandible and probing with the upper one for grubs, termites and other insects; the Mana (Hawaii Creeper) which does a good job gleaning other insects from the surfaces of large tree trunks and branches.

Some tracts of native woodland have been set aside for wilderness preservation; but these are scattered, and some are small. Most do not provide enough climate variation to provide seasonal sanctuary. Rejoice that we have them. Work to get more and larger ones.

When drought dries up water sources and reduces insect populations, the birds travel over the woodlands seeking better foraging places with water to drink. Some bird species, like the Mana and 'Akiapola'au, will not fly long distances over open country. They must have forest areas to travel through or over. The 'O'u shuns any clearing or opening in the forest, as ornithologists have noted for at least a hundred years.

More common native birds like the 'Apapane, 'Amakihi and 'I'iwi will travel several miles over pasture or barren lava to reach a feeding site. They, too, favor big koa and 'ohi'a trees over smaller ones. The 'Elepaio, however, prefers to live in the lower story at or below tree fern level. But they, too, profit from the presence of the big trees.

For the big trees spread their branches widely, casting a light shade over the smaller trees, shrubs, ferns, etc. below. The shade cuts down on excessive evaporation, while transpiration from the big trees' leaves helps to keep a moist air blanket over the forest and encourages cloud drip, which in turn keeps more moisture in the top

soil, where most of the plants get their water and nourishment and most deposit their mineral laden cast off leaves and branches.

As long as there is a variety of growth in the forest there will be a variety of products deposited in the soil, which will keep it in balance. Then birds, the little creatures they feed upon, the fruits, seeds and other things needful for them and the rest of the forest will all thrive together.

Timber men will tell you that old trees are 'decadent' and should be removed so only young vigorous trees would remain. This is like saying that all persons who are showing signs of age and some disability should be removed from society because they can no longer do what young athletes do. As an oldster myself I resent that old people and old trees should no longer be thought useful to our respective societies just because our bodies are twisted and we no longer stand as erect as we used to.

## ALOHA TO NEW MEMBERS

The Society wishes to welcome the following new members and urge them to participate in the Society's activities.

Joint with National: Margaret S. Hodge, Kanakakai; Mrs. Asleain Hodges, Daly City, California, Osee C. Mallio, APO San Francisco, California, and Mr. Keith Omer, Ft. Shafter.

Local and Subscribers: Juan-Marc Coulombe, Quebec, Canada; and Oliver W. Johnson, Golden, Colorado.

A sincere mahalo to William A. Williams of Laguna Hills for a contribution.

## NOTE TO CONTRIBUTORS TO THE 'ELEPAIO

All contributions concerning natural history and conservation are welcomed, especially those pertaining to the Pacific area. The Editorial Committee wishes to encourage material from the Pacific Islands, such as the Trust Territory, Guam, American Samoa, and other areas. Articles on all natural history subjects are solicited.

It would facilitate the processing and review of your contribution if it could be submitted typewritten and double spaced, although this is not a requirement. All articles of a scientific nature are sent out for comments to at least two reviewers familiar with the subject.

To insure proper handling and rapid publishing of your contribution, it should be mailed to the Editor: C.J. Ralph, 3467 Alani Drive, Honolulu, HI 96822.



## 1978 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Six Christmas Bird Counts are planned for December on Kauai, Oahu, Maui and the Big Island. Each of the counts can use more counters, including people not familiar with the birds of a particular island. Special attention is called to the new Maui count under the direction of Dr. John F. Walters. Get in touch with a compiler if you are interested.

### WAIPIO, OAHU

Sat., December 16

The Waipio Count, now in its second year, is centered near Mililani town, and covers some of the best birding areas on Oahu: "hot spots" for birds such as Waipio Peninsula and Poamoho Trail are included in the count circle. Several parties are needed for the different sectors which extend from Pearl Harbor to the Schofield area in the North-South direction, and from the crest of the Koolaus to the crest of the Waia-naes in the East-West direction. All interested observers are welcome and needed! For more information contact Maile Stemmermann, Compiler, 46458 Haiku Plantation Drive, Kaneohe, Oahu 96744; home telephone, 235-1693.

### LIHUE, KAUAI

Sat., December 16

The Lihue Count extends from the Wailua River around to the Hanapepe River, including the area from the mountains to the ocean. This will be the eighth annual count for this area. This count always produces good numbers of the lowland birds as well as the possibility of exciting water and shorebirds. Aside from regular counters, people counting around their homes and/or bird feeders, or those at sea fishing on the count day would be appreciated. Contact the compiler, Mrs. Winona Sears at 822-3045, or write her at 190 Lulo Road, Kapaa, Kauai 96746.

### KAPAA, KAUAI

Sun., December 17

The Kapaa Count extends from the Wailua River around the North Shore to Hanalei National Wildlife Refuge. It includes all this area from the mountains to the sea. This count includes the very productive and scenic taro fields of the refuge and nearby areas. Yard counters or fishermen at sea are solicited for counts on the count day. The compiler is Delano Kawahara at 822-3271, R.R. 1, Box 261-A-21, Kapaa, Kauai 96746.

### HONOLULU, OAHU

Sun., December 17

The Honolulu Christmas Count, initiated in 1939, covers a 15 mile diameter circle centered near Nuuanu Pali overlook. The area extends from Aiea Trail to Paiko Lagoon on the leeward side of the island, and from Kahaluu to Waimanalo on the windward side. The long series of counts in this same area provides a good indication of trends in bird populations, particularly for certain introduced species undergoing significant increases or decreases over a period of years. One or two parties are assigned to each of ten sectors within the count area. All potential participants are welcome for a day of birding. The compiler is Robert L. Pyle, 741 North Kalaheo Ave., Kailua, Oahu 96734; telephone 262-4046.

### CENTRAL AREA, MAUI

Fri., December 22

This will be the first Christmas Bird Count ever held on the island of Maui. The count area will include some shore and water bird areas as well as forest bird habitat. All participants are urged to contact the compiler: Dr. John F. Walters: R.R. 1, Box 518, Kula, Maui 96790; telephone: 878-1874 (home) or 244-9181 xt. 103 (office).

### VOLCANO, HAWAII

Sat., December 30

The Volcano Christmas Count, with its 15-mile diameter circle centered at Kulani Cone, features a variety of rich and critical habitats on Mauna Loa and Kilauea Volcano. The area includes Keauhou Ranch, Kilauea Forest Reserve, Kulani Correctional Facility, Upper Waiakea Forest Reserve, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, Olaa Forest Reserve, and the Volcano community. A total of 12 endemic bird species have been recorded in past counts, of which 6 are endangered.

For the second year in a row we are planning to include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service census transects. Therefore, we would encourage experienced observers to participate, as well as beginners.

If you would like to participate in a day of bird counting in this area on 30 December, please contact Larry Katahira, Compiler, P.O. Box 100, Hawaii National Park, HI 96718. Home phone 967-7416; office 967-7311.



## PUBLICATIONS OF THE SOCIETY

HAWAII'S BIRDS by the Society (1978). This is the best field guide to our birds, and includes colored illustrations of all native and well-established exotic species. \$3.25 plus postage: 48¢ (surface mail) or 67¢ (air). Hawaii residents only: add 13¢ for tax.

FIELD CHECKLIST OF BIRDS OF HAWAII by R. L. Pyle (1976). A pocket-size field card listing 125 species found in Hawaii with space for notes of field trips.  
(Postpaid) . . . . . \$ .25  
(ten or more, 10¢ per copy)

GUIDE TO HAWAIIAN BIRDING by members of the Society and edited by C.J. Ralph (1977). Where to go and some idea of what you are likely to see. For the islands of Kauai, Oahu, Lanai, Molokai, Maui and Hawaii.  
(Postpaid) . . . . . \$ 1.00

PRELIMINARY LIST OF THE BIRDS OF HAWAII by R. L. Pyle (1977). An authoritative compilation of all species naturally occurring in Hawaii as well as those introduced by man which are currently established as viable populations. Gives each species' status.  
(Postpaid) . . . . . \$1.00

ENDANGERED WATERBIRDS OF THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS by R. J. Shallenberger (1978). Hawaiian Stilt, Coot, Gallinule and Duck, each described in 2 pages of photos and text. Covers description, ecology, status, and distribution.  
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KOKUA FOR LIFE. . . *Wildlife Needs You* (1978). Attractive Black-and-light-tan depiction of Hawaiian Duck and techniques for studying it, with Information Sheet. . . . . \$ .50

DETAILS OF AUDUBON ACTIVITIES  
FOR NOVEMBER

Nov. 4. *Maui Field Trip* to Kanaha Pond. This is a well-known spot for various water and shore birds. It is also a state wildlife refuge featuring endangered waterbirds. Meet at the viewing area on the south side of the pond at 7:30 a.m. Bring lunch, water, binoculars and telescope (if you have one). Leader: Dr. John F. Walters (878-1874).

Nov. 11. *Hawaii Island Field Trip* to Pu'u Maka'ala area, recommended for Natural Area Reserve, for 7-mile hike on jeep roads and trails in diversified native rain forest. Meet at power pole #314 on Stainback Highway (to Kulani Prison) at the jeep road intersection, on the Puna side of the highway. This is about 15 miles mauka of Route 11. Meet at 9 a.m. sharp. Bring lunch and be prepared for mud and rain. Joint trip with Sierra Club. Leaders: Mae and Bill Mull (967-7352).

Nov. 12. *Field Trip* to Pearl Harbor, Oahu. Waterfowl and shorebird areas, including Waipio Peninsula. The ducks should be in good numbers now, and the shorebirds will probably have among them some interesting species. Meet at the Hawaii State Library at Punchbowl and King Streets, at 7 a.m. Bring water, lunch, binoculars and telescope (if you have one). Leader: Tim Burr (235-4036).

Nov. 20. *General Meeting*. Note new location! "Birds of Haleakala National Park" by Sheila Conant and Maile Stemmermann will feature an exciting slide presentation of seldom-visited forest and upland areas. Our new meeting place at the McCully-Moiliili Library provides excellent seating and viewing for our meetings. The library is at 2211 South King St., between the University and Punahou exits off the freeway. There is plenty of free and sheltered parking available on the makai side of the library.

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## HAWAII AUDUBON EXECUTIVE BOARD

## HAWAII AUDUBON SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

(For details, see inside back page)

Nov. 4. Field Trip to Kanaha Pond, Maui.  
Shorebirds and waterfowl. Leader: John  
F. Walters 878-1987.

Nov. 11. Field trip to Puu Makaala, Hawaii  
Island, for forest birds and plants.  
Leaders: Mae and Bill Mull (967-7352).

Nov. 12. Field Trip to Pearl Harbor, Oahu,  
waterbird areas. Leader: Tim Burr  
(235-4036).

Nov. 7. Board Meeting at the Ralph's  
home, 3467 Alani Drive, Manoa (988-6921),  
7 p.m. All members welcomed.

Nov. 20. General Meeting. *Birds of Hale-  
akala National Park, Maui*, by Sheila  
Conant and Maile Stemmermann. *Note new  
location!!* McCully-Moiliili Library,  
2211 South King; 7:30 p.m.

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