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‘Alawī: A New Old Name for the Hawai‘i Creeper

By: Noah Gomes

In collaboration with Alex Wang and Anya Tagawa. Noah Gomes is from Wahiawa, O‘ahu. He is a recent graduate of the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo with an M.A. in Hawaiian Language and Literature. His thesis is titled “Meha ka Leo i ka Nahele: He Noi‘ina i ka Po‘e Kapili Manu o ke Au Kahiko” (“A Lonely Voice in the Woods: Research on the Bird Hunters of Ancient Times”). He is currently employed with the Interpretation Division at Hawai‘i Volcanoes National Park.

For more than 100 years there has been no known Hawaiian name for the endangered bird now commonly called the Hawai‘i Creeper (*Loxops mana*). A review of the major literature on native Hawaiian birds by important authors in the late 19th and early 20th centuries reveals no specific Hawaiian name for this bird. The earliest of these authors was Scott B. Wilson who first arrived in Hawai‘i in 1887. While he was the first westerner to record the existence of *L. mana*, he did not collect any ethnographic anecdotes on it from native Hawaiians, probably because he did not realize that it was a separate species from the superficially similar Hawai‘i ‘Amakihi (*Chlorodrepanis virens*) until his specimens were examined when he returned to England (Wilson & Evans 1890, xvii-xviii, 47). Later, Lionel Walter Rothschild, utilizing information from his collectors (most notably Henry Palmer) erroneously gave the name “‘Akikiki” for *L. mana*, which is the Hawaiian name for the closely related monogeneric *Oreomystis bairdi* of Kaua‘i. Rothschild must have assumed that such similar birds would have shared the same native name, in spite of the relatively great distance between Kaua‘i and Hawai‘i islands (Rothschild 1893, 117). George C. Munro and Henry W. Henshaw provide no native name for *L. mana* in their own respective published works (Henshaw 1902, 46-47; Munro 1967, 106). However, the great naturalist Robert C.L. Perkins apparently made some effort in looking for a name for *L. mana*, noting that it, “...is not distinguished by natives of the present day from the Amakihi (*Chlorodrepanis*), but it is unlikely that a bird so different in voice and habits had no special name in the days of the old professional bird-hunters.” (Perkins 1913, 413)

Perkins appears to have been correct in his guess that the formerly ubiquitous *L. mana* was unique enough to have had a Hawaiian name. A handful of primary sources provide corroborative evidence that names *Loxops mana* as the true identity of the “‘alawī,” a mysterious bird with deep native Hawaiian cultural roots.



‘Alawī, the Hawai‘i Creeper. Photo Credit: Rich Downs

Evidence: Kumulipo, a Hawaiian genealogical chant of the birth of the universe, has possibly the earliest mentioning of ‘alawī in literature. In Kumulipo the ‘alawī is shown to be the “child” of the ‘alalā (*Corvus hawaiiensis*). Unfortunately there is no other additional information from this chant. (Beckwith, 195)

In 1908 Joseph Moku‘ōhai Poepoe published a version of the Hawaiian traditional epic “Ka Moolelo Kaa o Hiiakaikapoliopele” in the Hawaiian language newspaper Kuokoa Home Rula. The story ran as a series of installments. Two

birds are mentioned who were spies and younger brothers of the mo‘o¹ named Pana‘ewa. These are named “Alawī” and “Alaiaha.” I have translated a portion below from the original Hawaiian:

“The small guardians of Pana‘ewa, who were the younger bird brothers of that kupua [supernatural being] were Alawī and Alaiaha. These were small birds with little eyes. The swiftness of these birds was like the flashing of the brightness of lightning. Local people travelling through the lehua forest could never escape being caught in storms, because of the calls of these small birds.

What these birds would do is watch all travelers heading toward Hilo or perhaps returning to Ka‘ū, whether important people or minor people. If they were watching and saw a kupua, then they would fly off immediately to tell Pana‘ewa...” (Kahiolo 1908)

The description does not tell us much except that the ‘alawī is a forest bird that lived in east Hawai‘i with small eyes that moves quickly and likes to watch people. The Hawai‘i creeper has been noted as a bird with a curious nature that leads it to approach humans in the forest.

In 1863 G.W. Kahiolo published a series of articles on native

birds in the Hawaiian language newspaper, Ka Nupepa Kuokoa. The very last entry on June 13th is for the “Manu Alawi.” I have translated below:

The Alawi Bird

The size of this bird is similar to the Amakihi (*C. virens*), and its feathers are similar to those of the Omao (*Myadestes obscurus*), and its legs and beak are similar to the Amakihi.

Its call is “wi-wi-wi” [“wī” is a high pitched squeak], and the flowers of the upland are its’ food, such as the lehua (*Metrosideros sp.*), wil-wili (*Erythrina sandwicensis*), awikiwiki (*Canavalia hawaiiensis*) and haha (*Cyanea sp.*) and other flowers.

This is a very delicious bird, similar to the Akakane (‘apapane, *Himatione sanguinea*) and the Iwi (‘Iwi, *Drepanis coccinea*).

Though we know that *L. mana* has a diet consisting largely of arthropods, it is known to also drink some nectar. One of Kahiolo’s sources of information was likely the traditional Hawaiian bird hunters, who would have still been alive at that time. To these people the fact that *L. mana* takes nectar from flowers would have been very important. From what is generally known about traditional hunting of forest birds, if someone were to have tried to catch *L. mana* in the old days he would probably use flowers as bait. This is also the reason why Kahiolo was able to specify which specific kinds of flowers the bird was known to take nectar from.

The last source of information on the ‘alawī are the research notes of Dr. Nathaniel Emerson. Emerson’s 1895 treatise on Hawaiian bird hunting is perhaps the most important single article on the subject. Emerson interviewed various Hawaiians about their family traditions and used some of that information to create his article. Among his interviewees was T.C. Polikapu (also sometimes spelled Polikapapa). Polikapu gives a list of birds caught by his family in the Pana‘ewa and ‘Ōla‘a areas of Hawai‘i island. The following is taken from a typescript created by Theodore Kelsey:

Oct. 5, 1893. T.C. Poli-kapu.

Kia-manu, a bird-catching stick 12 feet or so long [notice that different sources gave different lengths as being normal], made of ‘olomea, kauila, ‘ulei, lama, kopiko, and perhaps other woods. **My ancestors were bird-catchers (po‘e kia-manu). They resorted to the forest of Pana-‘ewa, in Hilo.** The ‘ohi‘a was the principal tree of the forest, and its flowers were the attraction to the birds, but all the trees flourished there. The birds also sought the flower of the hahalua, noni, and hau.

The time for taking the birds was in Nov., Dec., and Jan., - Welehu, Ikuwa, and Makalii.

Their people resorted to the mountains, but later, when the south wind began to blow in Feb., the birds left the inland forests of Pana-‘ewa and Olaa, and went toward the coast, whither the bird-catchers followed them. The birds were ‘ō‘ō, ‘iwi, ‘iwi-polena, ‘olokele, ‘akakani or ‘apapani, ‘amakihi, ‘ō‘ū (‘ō‘ū – holo‘oko‘a and ‘ō‘ū poo-lapalapa), mamo, apekepeke (‘elepaio), ‘aalawi’ [‘alawī], and ‘oma‘o. (Emerson 1891, 32).

“‘Aalawi” is almost certainly the same as ‘alawī. The double vowel is likely a transcription error. The apostrophes intentionally indicate a glottal stop (‘okina) at the beginning of the word and an elongated vowel on the last letter (kahakō). From this we can presume that the spelling of the name is has been shown in the title of this article (‘alawī).

Opposing Evidence

In the Hawaiian Dictionary Pukui and Elbert list “Alawi” (without an ‘okina, the glottal stop) as a name for the Kaua‘i ‘amakihi (*Chlorodrepanis stejnegeri*), the young of the ‘anianiau (*Magumma parva*), and an additional unknown upland bird. (Pukui and Elbert 1986, 19) While this may seem like condemning evidence against the argument for a *L. mana* identification for the ‘alawī, this information actually supports that idea. Both Polikapu and Poepoe indicate that a bird named ‘alawī at some point also lived on Hawai‘i island. When examining Kahiolo’s description, *L. mana* also has a much more similar plumage to *M. obscurus* than either one of these Kaua‘i birds.

Pukui and Elbert also suggest the name “‘Alauahio” for the “Hawaiian Creepers” on O‘ahu, Maui, Lāna‘i, and Hawai‘i (species now divided into the genera *Paroreomyza*, *Oreomyzta*, and *Loxops*) (*ibid.*). Unfortunately they do not give their sources for this information. I cannot refute their claim that ‘alauahio is the true name for *L. mana*, but I can find no additional supporting evidence that ‘alauahio is the Hawaiian name of this bird. No other English or Hawaiian sources mention ‘alauahio as a possible name for any bird found on Hawai‘i island. Older bird literature does however lump the “Hawaiian Creepers” together as a single species, which has been disproven by taxonomists today. For that reason, I believe that Pukui and Elbert either assumed that ‘alauahio is a name for *L. mana* because of its similarity to other birds, or they simply made an error.

Conclusion

If we accept the evidence that a small forest bird with dull plumage similar to *M. obscurus*, and a size, legs and beak similar to *C. virens* once lived in the forests of east Hawai‘i island then *L. mana* is the only possible candidate known to science that we can consider. The extinct Hawai‘i island endemic *Viridonia sagittirostris* (another bird with no official Hawaiian name) could also possibly meet the description, but *L. mana* matches the *C. virens* size comparison and the *M. obscurus* plumage description much more easily. It was also historically much more common and easily observed, and therefore more likely to have had a name.

It is probably impossible to know with complete certainty that the ‘alawī is in fact *L. mana*. but there is unusually good evidence supporting this argument. There are not many other possible candidates that match the identity of a conspicuous small grayish green forest bird currently lacking a known Hawaiian name. We can say with confidence that ‘alawī is almost certainly the Hawaiian name for *Loxops mana*.

As more and more of native Hawaiian species become endangered and even extinct, it has become critical to not only understand their ecological importance, but also the roles they play in our lives and those of our ancestors. This discovery of the traditional name, ‘alawī for *L. mana* reveals a new opportunity to preserve our Hawaiian cultural heritage.

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¹ Mo‘o are a kind of shapeshifting supernatural being which often take the form a reptile.

‘Alawī: A New Old Name for the Hawai‘i Creeper

By: Noah Gomes

“‘Alawī” a new old name for the Hawai‘i Creeper was approved by the Hawaiian Lexicon Committee on December 3, 2016 and February 25, 2017. “The first Hawaiian Lexicon Committee (Kōmike Hua‘ōlelo) was established in 1987 to create words for concepts and material culture unknown to our [Hawaiian] ancestors. Committee members were native speakers of Hawaiian, most of them elderly, who saw the value in and the need for creating new Hawaiian words. Although some of these first committee members have passed on, the fruits of their labor from the foundation upon which the present committee’s work is based.” Below is a statement from Larry Kimura (committee chair of The Hawaiian Lexicon Committee; Ka Haka ‘Ula O Ke‘likōlani at Hilo) on approving the Hawaiian name – “‘Alawī” for the Hawai‘i Creeper:

“The Hawaiian Lexicon Committee does two approvals on words before we accept them as official for the new words repository, Māmaka Kaiao. The first approval for the ‘Alawī Hawai‘i Creeper, *Loxops mana*, was on Dec. 3, 2016, and the final and 2nd approval was on Feb. 25, 2017.”

Literature Cited:

“The Hawaiian Lexicon Committee.” N.p., n.d. Web. <<http://ulukau.org/elib/collect/mkd/index/assoc/D0.d>



‘Alawī, the Hawai‘i Creeper. Photo Credit: Rich Downs

State Art Museum Renovation Schedule Yields to Pair of Nesting White Terns

By: Rich Downs (HAS Board Member, Co-founder and Coordinator of the Hui Manu o Kū), Keith Swindle (Resident Agent in Charge, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

There are over 2300 white terns that call the greater Honolulu metropolitan area home during breeding season, but there's one that has attracted particular attention in recent weeks. Why? Because of its peculiar nesting strategy. Often incorrectly referred to as fairy terns, white terns are seabirds found on many islands in the Pacific. As seabirds they spend most of their lives at sea, coming ashore primarily to breed. On Oahu they are commonly seen soaring alone or in pairs in the sky above their breeding range that currently extends from the Niu Valley in the east to Pearl Harbor/Hickam Air Force Base in the west.

As a species white terns are peculiar for not building nests, but laying their eggs directly on the branch surface. Tern watchers on Oahu are accustomed to seeing them hunkered down on branches waving in the wind, marveling at their ability to defy the odds for the five weeks it takes to incubate their single egg. Visitors to the sparsely inhabited northwestern islands, including Midway Island, can see them breeding in much larger numbers. Here man-made structures are more plentiful than trees and it seems virtually any surface will suffice. In addition to the few available trees, building ledges, air conditioner covers, and outdoor water faucet handles are all pressed into service for nesting. Until recently this breeding behavior had not been recorded on Oahu. The ready availability of good breeding habitat in the well-manicured trees of the urban Honolulu area made resorting to nesting on unnatural surfaces unnecessary.

For the past couple of years a single nesting pair of white terns has been going against the local practice by laying its eggs on the railing of the lanai on the third floor of the Hawaii State Art Museum on Hotel Street. They did it most recently in the middle of March, during the height of the current breeding season. An interesting



Pair of White Terns that recently laid an egg on the State Art Museum railing.
Photo Credit: Cathy Young



The "famous" White Tern.
Photo Credit: Cathy Young

event from an ornithological perspective but not particularly newsworthy. So when news crews with cameras from local TV stations showed up to file reports on the scene it was clear that something more was happening. When the story was then picked up by a national wire service and carried in news outlets on the mainland it was clearly no longer a story about

a couple of white terns and their non conforming breeding strategy.

What made this particular nesting event newsworthy was the fact that the newly laid egg confronted the museum and the State of Hawaii with a real dilemma. Work on an \$8 million building renovation project was scheduled to begin in April, before the egg hatched. However, white terns are listed as a migratory bird under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (MBTA). The MBTA prohibits, among other things, the pursuit, capture, collection, injuring, killing or possession of white terns to include live or dead birds, their parts (e.g. feathers), chicks and eggs. The State of Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR) list the white tern as both an "indigenous" bird and as a "threatened" bird. The HAR states that "No person shall

remove, damage, or disturb the nest of any indigenous, endangered, or threatened species except...*(as otherwise authorized in the HAR)* (italics added). Federal and State enforcement officers typically view the laying of an egg as the initiation of a "nest". Importantly, neither federal nor state law prohibits a person from harassing (i.e. shooing away) adult white terns when they are not nesting (short of injuring or killing them, of course). But once an egg is laid, then the "nest" cannot be disturbed (by State law) or "taken" by federal law and any harassment of the attending adults must cease because that would disturb, kill or injure the egg or chick.

What to do? The laws enable a home or business owners, or property managers to preclude white terns from nesting in places that they don't want them to, if they can discourage them from nesting on, for example, a balcony railing. But such discouragement must be by legal methods, such as: shooing them away before they lay an egg; precluding their access by screening the balcony off until they nest elsewhere; or making the railing unappealing by modifying or replacing the railing to a round or peaked surface such that an egg cannot be balanced there. But once a white tern or other protected bird lays an egg, then the best (and legal) course of action is to wait and let nature take its course. And this will take some time since it's another 6-7 weeks from the time it hatches before a white tern chick is able to take even short flights.

And that's what the art museum and the state government are doing. Except for hardcore tern watchers, a pair of white terns laying an egg in the middle of breeding season, even on a man-made structure on Oahu, is no big deal. Delaying a planned \$8 million dollar construction project while a pair of birds raises their chick? That's news!

Freeman Seabird Preserve Habitat Restoration 2017

By: Wendy Johnson (HAS Executive Director)
Photo Credits: Alice Roberts (HAS Board Member)

A wide variety of habitat restoration goals for the Society's Wedge-tailed Shearwater nesting site were met this year with the help of a total of 54 volunteers working at the Preserve on Saturday mornings from January through March. Several workers were weekly participants, much appreciated for their diligence and growing knowledge about the native plants they care for. Much of the work involves weeding of invasive alien grasses and other pesky weeds, in order to clear the pathways and to allow the native Hawaiian coastal plants to thrive. Two groups of volunteers from the local offices of the USFWS, and one group of UH Engineering students helped with major trimming, weeding and burrow cleaning efforts. One of the existing nesting mound structures on the upper portion of the Preserve was reconfigured into a donut shaped nesting area, in order to facilitate chick monitoring from July through November.



HAS Executive Director, Wendy Johnson, tells volunteers the history and goals of FSP.



Informational signage at Freeman Seabird Preserve.
Artwork by Patrick Ching.



HPU researcher, David Hyrenbach, repairs artificial burrows in preparation for returning Wedge-tail Shearwaters.



Volunteer plants additional naupaka shrubs.

Unusually heavy rains in late February and March resulted in rapid growth of both native plants and invasive grasses, so volunteers needed to work harder to keep the paths cleared this year. Drier, hotter weather to come will favor the native plants, while the shearwaters, which began returning to the Preserve in the evenings by mid-March, will impact the landscape with their burrowing, pooping and nesting activities.

Eggs will be laid in June with most chicks hatching in August. Adult Wedge-tailed Shearwaters forage for food off-shore most of the day, leaving their chicks alone on land until after dusk. The young chicks are very vulnerable to predation by rats, cats and mongoose. Once the chicks are grown and have developed feathers, usually sometime in the month of November, the adults stop returning to land and within a week or so the young birds fly off to sea in search of food.

Upcoming Events, Field Trips, & Volunteer Opportunities

Please RSVP with name and contact information to

Hawaii Audubon Society at (808) 528-1432 or hiaudsoc@pixi.com unless otherwise specified

For full descriptions of our Events, Field Trips and Volunteer Opportunities, go to our website: www.hawaii.audubon.org

EVENTS

Manu o Kū Festival

Where: 'Iolani Palace Coronation Lawn

When: Saturday May 20, 2017, 11:00am - 3:00pm

Description: This event is free and open to the public. Celebrate the Manu o Kū – Kū's Bird (White Tern) – Official Bird of Honolulu. *To VOLUNTEER, contact Marjoire Ziegler at (808) 593-0255*

Hawai'i Island Festival of Birds

Where: Kailua-Kona, Hawaii (Big Island)

When: September 15-17, 2017

Description: Celebrate Hawaii's unique blend of birds – from native honeycreepers found nowhere else in the world to common backyard birds from five continents. The annual Hawai'i Island Festival of Birds supports the Hawai'i Island Coast to Coast Birding Trail and the Hawai'i Wildlife Center.

Information: Tickets on sale now – www.birdfesthawaii.org

FIELD-TRIPS

Brigham Young University Hawai'i Museum of Natural History – Tour

When: Saturday, May 6th, 2017 10:00am – 12:00pm

Leader: Phil Bruner (HAS Board Member)

Description: Learn and explore about every large mammal of North America.

RSVP: *Please RSVP to hiaudsoc@pixi.com, subject line: BYUH Tour*

Just a Summertime Low-Low Tide:

Paikō Lagoon Wildlife Sanctuary

When: Saturday, June 24, 2017, 8:30am - approximately 10:00 am

Leader: Alice Roberts (HAS Board Member)

Description: Visit Paikō during mid-summer at very low tide (-0.4'). Learn about the many native plants at the waters edge. We may see some stay behind shorebirds as well as a resident pair of Hawaiian Stilts, year round 'Iwa, Egrets & Herons, lots of urban birds & ducks.

RSVP: *Please RSVP with Alice Roberts with your name and phone number at (808) 864-8122.*

Marine Corps Base Hawai'i: Tour of Red-Footed Booby Colony

When: Saturday, May 27, 2017 8:00am – 11:00am

Leader: Todd Russel (MCBH), Tony Leiggi (HAS Board Member)

Description: The Red-footed Booby colony located in the heart

of an active training range on Marine Corps Base Hawai'i is one of only two large booby colonies in the Main Hawaiian Islands; the other is managed by the Fish & Wildlife Service on Kaua'i. Approximately 2500 Boobies loaf or nest in the Ulupa'u Crater Wildlife Management Area. The Boobies have become quite acclimated to the sound of weapons fire and explosions on the Range. The Red-footed Booby is white with brown wings, has a blue bill and red feet. Red-footed boobies feed at sea, but nest on land in coastal trees and low growing shrubs; they are the only tree dwelling Booby in Hawai'i and are the smallest of more than half a dozen booby species. At the colony on MCB Hawaii, you can get quite close to them and their nests, but please stay at least 10 feet away so as not to cause stress to the adults or chicks. Pictures are permitted.

Information: ONLY 25 people maximum; prior waitlist will receive priority

RSVP: ONLY 25 people maximum; prior waitlist will receive priority. *Please RSVP by **May 7** to hiaudsoc@pixi.com, subject line: MCBH Tour*

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Contact hiaudsoc@pixi.com OR CALL (808) 528-1432 to volunteer.

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SCHOOL PROGRAMS: Help set up school programs and presentations about habitat and bird life in response to requests from local schools. Teaching experience is a plus!

EVENTS & PROGRAMS: Help organize speaking engagements and/or outings for members and the public.

HAWAI'I AUDUBON DISPLAYS: Volunteer to help answer questions and explain our mission to the public at this event, plus sell some of our great products. Be the face of Hawai'i Audubon!

DIGITAL 'ELEPAIO: Help HAS bring our 'Elepaio Journal archive into the digital age. Volunteers will work from our HAS office, scanning and saving older issues for posting at our website. Great job for history buffs!

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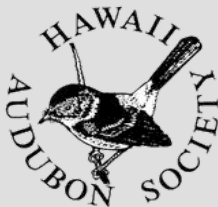
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Remote camera captured at night. Wedged-tailed Shearwater spotted with Albatross. Photo Credit: Lindsay Young, Pacific Rim Conservation

Wedge-tailed Shearwaters are Back!

The Wedge-tailed Shearwaters are back at the Freeman Seabird Preserve and Ka'ena Point Natural Area Preserve. Signs and sounds of Wedged-tailed Shearwaters at Freeman Seabird Preserve were first noticed in the second week of March. They are busy digging their burrows and joining the Albatross.



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2016 Kōlea T-shirt

Table of Contents

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- ‘Alawaī: A New Old Name for the Hawai‘i Creeper... 17
- State Art Museum Renovation Schedule Yields to Pair of Nesting White Terns..... 20
- Freeman Seabird Habitat Restoration 2017..... 21
- Upcoming Events, Field Trips, and Volunteer Opportunities..... 22