



# ‘ELEPAIO

Journal of the  
Hawaii Audubon Society  
For the Protection of  
Hawai‘i’s Native Wildlife

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## Alal Project Looks to the Next Stage of Recovery

HAS has been following current reintroduction efforts of ‘Alal (*Corvus hawaiiensis*) since its beginning in 2016, see ‘Elepaio 76:3. For more information about the project go to <https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/alalaproject>. The following update is a press release, which was first published by the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) on <https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/blog/2020/03/11/nr20-033/> on March 11, 2020.

(Hilo) – When the first group (cohort) of ‘Alal (Hawaiian crow) were released in 2016, researchers and scientists knew that the project would encounter obstacles and challenges. Recovering this iconic Hawaiian species would require dedication, coordination, and adaptation. The ‘Alal Project is now in the fourth year of releases, and despite losses, the project and the birds themselves are continuing to grow and learn in their new environment.

“We knew from the beginning, based on the long history of species reintroductions globally, that we would have setbacks,” said Jackie Gaudioso-Levita, coordinator for The Alal Project and biologist with the Hawai i DLNR Division of Forestry and Wildlife. Gaudioso-Levita explained, “The lack of ‘Alal existing in the wild means birds hatched in conservation breeding centers do not have the opportunity to learn survival skills from adults in a natural setting. That’s one of the issues we addressed more fully in the rewrite of our reintroduction plan in 2017, through anti-predator training, as well as release site selection and using social interactions to form release groups.”

Twenty years ago the ‘Alal was on the brink of extinction. In a last ditch effort to save the species, a group of state and federal government partners and San Diego Zoo Global (SDZG) began hatching and raising birds in conservation breeding centers at the San Diego Zoo Global’s Keauhou Bird Conservation Center on Hawai‘i Island and Maui Bird Conservation Center on Maui. Those birds became the basis of the program to release ‘Alal back into native forests and recover the species. In 2016 the first cohort of ‘Alal was released into the Pu‘u Maka‘ala Natural Area Reserve (NAR). Following initial losses from natural predators, the bird were re-captured and a new anti-predator training

program was created to better prepare the birds for life in their native habitat.

The Alal Project’s revised reintroduction plan included innovative new predator recognition training for the birds, and in 2017 a cohort of 11 birds was introduced into the forest. “After rigorous pre-release training to recognize raptors as predators and native fruits as food, the 11 released birds showed high survival for over a year, demonstrating encouraging behaviors such as predator defense and natural foraging,” said Alison Greggor, SDZG recovery ecology researcher.



‘Alal from the 2018 ‘Alal Release-Cohort #1, 9-24-18, photo credit DLNR.

During 2018 a group of ten birds was released and in 2019 a group of seven birds was released. Six birds from the 2017 cohort have since died or gone missing. Two of these birds were killed by ‘Io, one was killed by another ‘Alal , and the carcasses of three others were never recovered. Five of the ten birds in the 2018 cohort have died or went missing and only one of seven birds from the 2019 cohort has survived. Of the 27 birds released during 2017-2019, to date, ten remain surviving in the wild. While this can be heartbreaking for both the team members who care for the birds and people who follow the project, the losses are not entirely unexpected.

“Although we all regret the losses of these ‘Alal , this experience is not unlike those we have had with other species back on the mainland, like the California condor or the Stephens’ kangaroo rat, which had many obstacles to establishing successful reintroduction,” said Dr. Ron Swaisgood reintroduction specialist for SDZG. “I am heartened that we had high survival initially after our 2017 and 2018 ‘Alal reintroductions, indicating that the pre-release training and habitat management measures we took were working. But it is worrisome that recently many ‘Alal that had survived a year or more in the wild have now perished. We are all grappling with understanding and addressing these losses.”

Successes such as the pairing of released birds and nest building in 2019 are important milestones as the team and the birds move into this upcoming breeding season with hope that the remaining birds will successfully breed in the wild.

“It is incredible to watch as both the birds and the Project continue to adapt and learn through this process. The birds are exploring their new habitat, learning from each other, and learning how to survive on their own. We are grateful for the continued support of the community as well as all of our partners as we look to the next stage of recovery for the ‘Alal ,” said Michelle Bogardus, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Geographic Team Leader for Maui Nui and Hawai‘i Island.

The team continues to monitor the remaining five males and five females at Pu‘u Maka‘ala NAR, and remains cautiously optimistic. They’re working toward next steps for the species which is the release of a cohort in the South Kona area planned for 2022. Gaudioso-Levita said, “In the meantime, we are working to keep the ten surviving ‘Alal healthy and safe, through internal project expertise and

consulting with fellow reintroduction experts across the globe. We acknowledge more challenges are ahead, but the steps that will lead to the recovery of the species are still within reach.”

\*\*\*END\*\*\*

## Stop the Release of Floating Garbage

Earlier this year, Hawaii Audubon Society joined the growing list of organizations that support the Indiana Audubon Society’s (IAS) plea for a cessation of the traditional balloon release at the Indy 500. The goal is to convince the owners of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and its famous race, ‘The Indianapolis 500’, to cease its long-time tradition of one of the world’s largest, intentional release of balloons into the world’s atmosphere.

HAS shares IAS’s official position that intentional helium balloon releases should NOT be held due to their injurious effects upon wildlife.



*Deceased Laughing Gull entangled in balloon string (<https://digitalmedia.fws.gov/digital/collection/natdiglib/id/25254/rec/1>), photo credit: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.*

“Scientific research conducted by and reported by NOAA

Marine Debris Program, Scientific Reports, Phys.org, and the Ocean Conservancy, points to the littering of latex, Mylar, and composite material balloons as being mistaken for food by wildlife and causing loss of nutrition, intestinal injury and obstruction, and death. Balloon strings and ribbons have caused lethal entanglement, injury, infection, and death in birds and other wildlife.” (<https://indianaudubon.org/2019/11/04/indiana-audubon-speaks-out-against-indy-500-balloon-release>). The website includes a link to a petition against the balloon release.

We have all read about it in the news and seen grizzly pictures of entangled wildlife as well as carcasses with an incredible amount of plastic found in their digestive system. And although headlines about balloon entanglements are relatively rare, it is clear that we do not need any more plastic trash:

**April 2018: ‘64 Pounds of Trash Killed a Sperm Whale in Spain, Scientists Say’.** Plastic bags, ropes, netting and even a plastic drum were found in the digestive system. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/12/science/sperm-whale-death-spain.html>

**March 2019: ‘Dead Philippines whale had 40kg (88 lbs) of plastic in stomach’.** Researchers found 16 rice sacks in its stomach as well as multiple shopping bags. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47608949>

**April 2019: ‘Stranded baby dolphin in Florida had plastic trash in its stomach’.** A necropsy revealed that the female rough-toothed dolphin had a piece of a balloon and two plastic bags in her stomach. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/29/us/rough-toothed-dolphin-stranded/index.html>

**July 2019: ‘Plastic pollution is making seabirds smaller and sicker, a study has found’.** Not only are adults ingesting plastic, they are also feeding their chicks with it. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/30/health/seabirds-plastic-pollution-health-problems-scli-intl/index.html>

**August 2019: ‘Famous dugong dies after eating plastic’.** Several pieces of plastic including one measuring 20 cm (8 inches) were found inside her stomach. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49380633>

Volunteers, organizations, and agencies try to keep up with the ever increasing problem. HAS Board member Susan Scott spent one month on Midway Atoll this winter to count Albatrosses and encountered an enormous pile of plastic debris. Find some of her photos in the following article, which shows the challenges that clean-up crews are facing, especially in remote locations.



*Young, unmated albatrosses sometimes “practice” sitting on objects that resemble eggs, such as this orange fishing float that washed ashore, photo credit: Susan Scott, Volunteer, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).*

This news release was first published by the USFWS on April 13, 2019 on <https://usfwspacific.tumblr.com/post/159534432180/taking-out-the-trash-at-the-edge-of-the-world>:

## **Taking Out the Trash at the Edge of the World**

***What does it mean to take out the trash when you’re 1500 miles away from the nearest dumpster?***

In April 2019, the USFWS, the State of Hawai‘i, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) collected over 100,000 pounds of marine debris that had been collecting on the shores of Kure Atoll State Wildlife Sanctuary and Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and Battle of Midway National Memorial within Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.

Thanks to support from the State of Hawai‘i, Division of Forestry and Wildlife, the mountain of marine debris—12 shipping containers holding an estimated 100,000 pounds—was shipped to Honolulu from Midway Atoll aboard the charter vessel Kahana.

The debris was collected from the reefs and beaches of Midway and Kure Atolls over the last six years and stored on the tarmac at Midway until it could be removed and shipped to Honolulu. Now, through the Nets to Energy Program, it will be processed by Schnitzer Steel Corporation



*It takes a village to clean up debris, photo credit: DLNR.*

and transported to the City and County of Honolulu’s H-POWER plant (a Covanta Energy Corporation facility), where it is incinerated to produce electricity.

“The success of this project is linked to effective inter-agency coordination, communication and action,” said Jason Misaki, Oahu Wildlife Manager, DLNR’s Division of Forestry and Wildlife. “Marine debris in the Monument affects all partners, making joint efforts like this one extremely instrumental to our continued protection of resources.”



*At least 10 Laysan albatrosses and one black-footed albatross chose to nest in the middle of this marine debris pile on Midway Atoll, photo credit: Susan Scott, Volunteer, USFWS.*

Marine debris is a potentially lethal entanglement and ingestion hazard for wildlife - including threatened

Hawaiian green sea turtles and endangered Hawaiian monk seals. Plastic debris and fishing line are often ingested by wildlife such as seabirds and can lead to their starvation and death. At Midway and Kure Atolls, plastics, derelict fishing gear and other marine debris is present in nests along the beach and often consumed by albatross chicks.

More than five tons of plastics end up on Midway Atoll each year because adult albatrosses feed their chicks plastics they forage in the ocean for food. Plastics break down into smaller pieces but never go away, affecting all levels of the ocean ecosystem. “Marine debris are not something you can clean up just once; it takes a sustained effort over time,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Superintendent Matt Brown. “By working with the state of Hawai‘i, Office of Hawaiian Affairs and NOAA, we can accomplish more than any one agency on its own to clean up marine debris and educate the public to prevent it from entering the ecosystem.” Each year the USFWS, the State of Hawaii, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration staff and volunteers collect tons of marine debris from the atolls and throughout the Monument.



*Mature albatrosses often build their nests close to the area they hatched. Apparently, marine debris is not a deterrent in choosing a nest site. It is hard to spot the bird in this pile of rubbish on Midway Atoll, photo credit: Susan Scott, Volunteer, USFWS.*

“With the high rate of marine debris accumulation in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, removing debris is imperative to ensure the health of this valuable habitat and the species that call it home. We are happy to have the opportunity to work with partners on this important initiative,” said Mark Manuel, NOAA Marine Debris Program Pacific Islands Regional Coordinator.

## “Wedgies” are Back at Freeman Seabird Preserve (FSP)!

By HAS Executive Director Wendy Johnson and  
HAS Board member Alice Roberts

The first Wedge-tailed Shearwater to return to FSP for the breeding season was photographed by a stationary camera on site on the night of March 10. During regularly scheduled habitat restoration work on Saturday (March 14), volunteers noticed guano on several spots at the Preserve. Black Point neighbors were eager to share the news that the birds had been heard making their distinctive “moaning” vocalizations in the area. By the next Saturday (March 21), several birds were seen tucked into artificial rock, brick, and ceramic nests as well as cliffside lava burrows.

Experiencing the return of these migratory seabirds is a fulfilling reward for the dedicated volunteers, who have spent hundreds of hours since early January removing invasive plants, restoring trails, trimming trees and hedges, repairing burrows and maintaining predator monitoring and control systems.



*FSP volunteers Stephen Haus, Marie Sode, and C J Sutton prepare to plant the new Naupaka donated by Ultimate Innovations, Inc. Under the white plastic behind them is some of the removed infested Naio. After 6 weeks of quarantine on the property, it was taken to H-Power by OISC, photo credit: Alice Roberts.*

After the adult and fledgling Wedgies had flown out to sea in November through December 2019, the O‘ahu Invasive Species Committee (OISC) removed and destroyed all native Naio hedges at FSP in an effort to control the spread of Myoporum thrips, an alien tiny insect that has devastated native Naio on the Big Island. Find more information about this threat in the ‘Elepaio 80.1, pg 1.



*The Heliotrope tree planted in donut mound #5 is doing really well. “I am hoping that one day a Manu O K (White Tern) will nest in it” says HAS Board member and FSP volunteer coordinator Alice Roberts, photo credit: Alice Roberts.*

As a result, habitat restoration at FSP this year involved planting dozens of new Naupaka plants, two Loulu palms, other native shrubs, and a Beach Heliotrope tree. Many of these new plants were donated to the Hawaii Audubon Society, along with all labor and follow-up care. At the same time, 15 baby ‘Ohai were donated and planted amongst the cliffside rocks.



*HAS Executive Director Wendy Johnson had signs made to hopefully deter frequent trespassers from entering the Preserve in search for shoreline access, photo credit: Alice Roberts.*

Saturday volunteer activities are now finished for the year, but the Wedge-tailed Shearwaters will be monitored remotely by on-site cameras, with scientific data collection and research beginning in July after the seabirds have laid their eggs.

For more information about the birds, plants and research, visit our FSP website: [www.freemanseabirdpreserve.com](http://www.freemanseabirdpreserve.com).

## Promise Continues in the Wild for One of the World's Rarest Birds

Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project (MFBRP) races to save one of the world's rarest birds, the Kiwikiu (Maui Parrotbill). Unfortunately, the project suffered a huge setback after the majority of released birds got killed by avian malaria. The disease is being transmitted by mosquitoes, which find their way up to higher altitudes and into Kiwikiu habitat due to anthropogenic climate change. Not only mosquitoes, but also habitat destruction, competition by invasive species, diseases, and predators make the future for this species look bleak. The following is a press release, which was first published by DLNR on <https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/blog/2019/11/12/nr19-190/> on November 12, 2019.

(Nakula Natural Area Reserve, Maui) – In late October, thirteen critically endangered Kiwikiu were brought to the leeward slope of Haleakal in the state's Nakula Natural Area Reserve (NAR). Over the past decade more than a quarter million native trees were planted in this NAR and the adjacent Kahikinui Forest Reserve to repair decades of habitat destruction caused by overgrazing by hooved animals like goats, cows, and sheep. One of the major goals of this effort was to recreate a largely native forest and understory as a new home for the Kiwikiu. Seven of these birds were captured in the wild in the Hanawi NAR and flown to Nakula. The other six Kiwikiu were reared in captivity at the Maui Bird Conservation Center (MBCC) and then transferred to Nakula for release.

"Unfortunately, of the thirteen birds translocated from Hanawi NAR or transferred from MBCC, we had five captive bird mortalities and four wild bird mortalities," said Dr. Hanna Mounce, Project Coordinator for the MFBRP, the lead organization in this multi-agency collaborative effort. "While we're waiting for the final necropsy results from San Diego Zoo Global, preliminary tests suggest the birds died from avian malaria, one of the major killers of forest birds in Hawai'i and one of our greatest challenges to saving these species," Dr. Mounce said. "Project team members say it's extremely important that Hawai'i moves quickly toward proposed new methods for controlling mosquitoes that transmit the disease to forest birds."

Though it is not possible to eradicate mosquitoes with existing conservation tools, the team has increased mosquito control efforts in the area to minimize the bird's exposure to the disease. Large-scale efforts to protect Kiwikiu and other forest birds from mosquitoes will be essential for the long-term survival of the species. Based on current monitoring, the team is cautiously optimistic about the survival of the remaining Kiwikiu. Experts in the field of species recovery say that efforts like this almost always have setbacks and a certain amount of mortality. Mounce explained, "When you

are dealing with a species, estimated to have only between 44 to 312 birds, it's tough to lose even one of them. However, everyone on the capture and release teams understands that this type of project rarely has a 100% survival rate. We're pleased that three male birds and one female are beginning to move away from the feeders we set up and are foraging on native plants and trees."

At the Hanawi NAR and MBCC, the soon-to-be moved birds were given thorough veterinary exams to determine their suitability for the cross-mountain transfer and release. After being moved to Nakula NAR, the birds spent ten days in aviaries in a small area in the southwestern corner of Nakula. Prior to being released, they were outfitted with tiny radio transmitters to help researchers track their movements over the next month and a half. Preliminary results show the birds are foraging close to their release sites, but on certain days ranging as far as a kilometer away.



*Kiwikiu, photo credit: DLNR.*

The Kiwikiu translocation project is a decade-long effort involving the Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project, the DLNR Division of Forestry and Wildlife, San Diego Zoo Global, the USFWS, and American Bird Conservancy. Continued monitoring and tracking of the birds is the near-term future goal. Additional captures and releases depend on how this first group does over the next few months and will not happen until next year at the earliest.

## Hawaii Audubon Society Membership/Donation Form

The mission of the Hawaii Audubon Society (HAS) is to foster community values that result in the protection and restoration of native wildlife and ecosystems and conservation of natural resources through education, science and advocacy in Hawaii and the Pacific. Founded in 1939, HAS is an independent non-profit 501(c)(3) organization and does not receive dues paid to the National Audubon Society. Thank you for supporting your local Hawaii Audubon Society.

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**Mahalo for your concern and commitment to protecting Hawai'i's native wildlife and ecosystems.**

### Announcements

#### K lea Count: A Hawaii Audubon Society project

This spring, HAS Board member Susan Scott has launched a citizen science project to count Hawai i's Pacific Golden-Plover (K lea) via an interactive website, [www.kleacount.org](http://www.kleacount.org).

The study centers on Hawai i's K lea, but birds be can entered anywhere worldwide on the site's map. Very few K lea have leg bands. Plover expert Wally Johnson (Science Advisor for the project) asks that anyone seeing a K lea with a leg band notify the Hawaii Audubon office. Susan will go there and photograph the bird.

Because these migratory shorebirds will be leaving for Alaska to raise their chicks near the end of April, the first month's entries on the website are a pilot study, allowing for some time to tweak the website before the K lea return to Hawai i in August.

Also check out Susan's other projects on [www.susanscott.net](http://www.susanscott.net), like her weekly Ocean Watch columns, where she will continue to be a voice for marine life.

### Upcoming Events and Field Trips

For regular updates, go to  
<http://www.hawaiiadubon.org/get-outside>

#### Paik Lagoon Wildlife Sanctuary

**June 20, 2020**, 8.30 am on Kuli ou ou Road

Leader: Alice Roberts (HAS Board member)

Visit Paik at low tide (-0.3'). Learn about the many native plants at the water's edge. We may see some stay-behind migratory shorebirds as well as a resident pair of Hawaiian Stilts, year round Iwa, Egrets & Herons, lots of urban birds & ducks, and other critters.

Please call or text 808-864-8122 and leave your name and phone number.

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A research grant of \$1,000 is awarded annually by the Hawaii Audubon Society and is oriented toward small-scale projects. Applicants are encouraged to solicit grants from other organizations to fund research that cannot be funded entirely by the Society. Deadline is June 30, other stipulations apply:

Go to <http://www.hawaii-audubon.org/grants> for more information.

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