



Observations of a Peale’s Peregrine Falcon in Waikiki, Hawai‘i November 23, 2020 - May 6, 2021

By Michael Walther

Michael Walther surveyed the status of native forest bird populations on Kaua‘i in 1994 and published his results in the ‘Elepaio 55:6 August/September 1995. He volunteered with the National Biological Survey in 1995 on a project that studied the Maui Akepa, Maui Nukupu‘u, Po‘ouli, Maui Parrotbill, and Crested Honeycreeper. Michael also wrote about “History and Status of the ‘Apapane on the Island of Lana‘i” in the ‘Elepaio 66:5 June/July 2006. He is the author of five books on native Hawaiian flora and fauna, including: *A Pocket Guide to Nature on O‘ahu*; *Images of Natural Hawai‘i*; *A Pictorial Guide of the Aloha State’s Native Forest Birds and Plants*; *Pearls of Pearl Harbor and the Islands of Hawai‘i*; *A Guide to Hawai‘i’s Coastal Plants and Extinct Birds of Hawai‘i*, as well as many articles in birding and nature publications. His photographs of Hawai‘i’s rare honeycreepers have appeared in “Hawai‘i,” “Aloha,” and “New Zealand Forest and Bird” magazines.

On November 23, 2020 at 9:30 am, I observed a juvenile Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) flying approximately 20 meters from my location. The falcon was interacting with several White Terns (*Gygis alba*). After a few seconds it disappeared over the 40-story condominium building where I reside. Our condo is approximately 90 meters above the Ala Wai Canal and has a 180-degree view of the southern Ko‘olau Mountains from Koko Crater to Punchbowl on the mauka (mountain) side. From the makai (ocean) side kitchen window, I can see from the Moana Sheraton to the Hilton Hawaiian Village (HHV) (Photo 1), Waikiki, and several kilometers offshore.

The falcon resided at the Hilton Hawaiian Village Tapa and Kealia Towers, which were closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic for most of its stay. I observed the bird on 96 days for about 70 hours. Total observations were 270 and consisted of the Peregrine perched (131), flying (111), and feeding (28). It was observed with White Terns during 35 observations. On many days, multiple behavioral observations were made at the same location. The falcon was observed at the following places; HHV (102), Ala Wai Canal area (20) above Kalakaua/Kuhio Avenues (4), and over the ocean off Waikiki (2). I did not observe the falcon on 68 of the 164 days it was on O‘ahu, but this was most likely because of the limited area I could see from my vantage point, or possibly it had left the Waikiki area and returned after being absent?

On November 30, 2020 at 11:08 am, I observed the Peregrine flying above the HHV with a White Tern in its talons being chased by a large flock of White Terns. This was the first of 15 observations where I watched the Peregrine catching or eating White Terns (Photo 2). They were a very significant food resource. On January 21, 2021, I observed the Peregrine eating three White Terns, and they were, most likely, its primary food source. The White Tern population in southeast O‘ahu is approximately 2,500 (Kessler 2020). If this falcon was averaging one White Tern



Photo 1: View of Tapa Tower and Kealia Tower at Hilton Hawaiian Village from our kitchen window, photo credit Michael Walther.



Photo 2: Peregrine Falcon with White Tern flying above Hilton Hawaiian Village on November 30, 2020, photo credit Michael Walther.

daily, that represents a loss of 6.5% from this small population.

The Peregrine based itself at the HHV and roosted often on either the Tapa Tower or Kealia Tower. I could easily see the east sides of these towers, but I could not see the other sides, so my observations were limited. Between November 23, 2020 and December 31, 2020, the Peregrine was observed making some flights above the Ala Wai Canal, Moilili, Kapiolani area, and into the Manoa Valley.

more times during its stay. Instead, it seemed to be hunting more along Fort Ruger Park on Ala Moana Blvd and perhaps in Ala Moana Park or other areas of O‘ahu and perhaps Kaua‘i?

On many days, when it was perched on the east side of Kealia Tower, I could watch it for hours resting, preening, stretching, and hopping along the rails of the rooms it was perched at. These rest periods averaged 3-5 hours. The falcon preferred the highest floors at the towers and spent many hours perched on two concrete ribbons that extend around the Kealia Tower; one at the roof and the other three floors lower.



Peregrine Falcon flying above the Ala Wai Canal on December 31, 2020, photo credit Michael Walther.

During most of these flights it was mobbed by White Terns. Figure 1 shows the flight routes of this Peregrine Falcon during November/December 2020. Beginning on January 1, 2021, the falcon seemed to shift its hunting/flying area as I only observed it on the mauka side of our building a few



Peregrine Falcon flying above the Ala Wai Canal on March 2, 2021, photo credit Michael Walther.

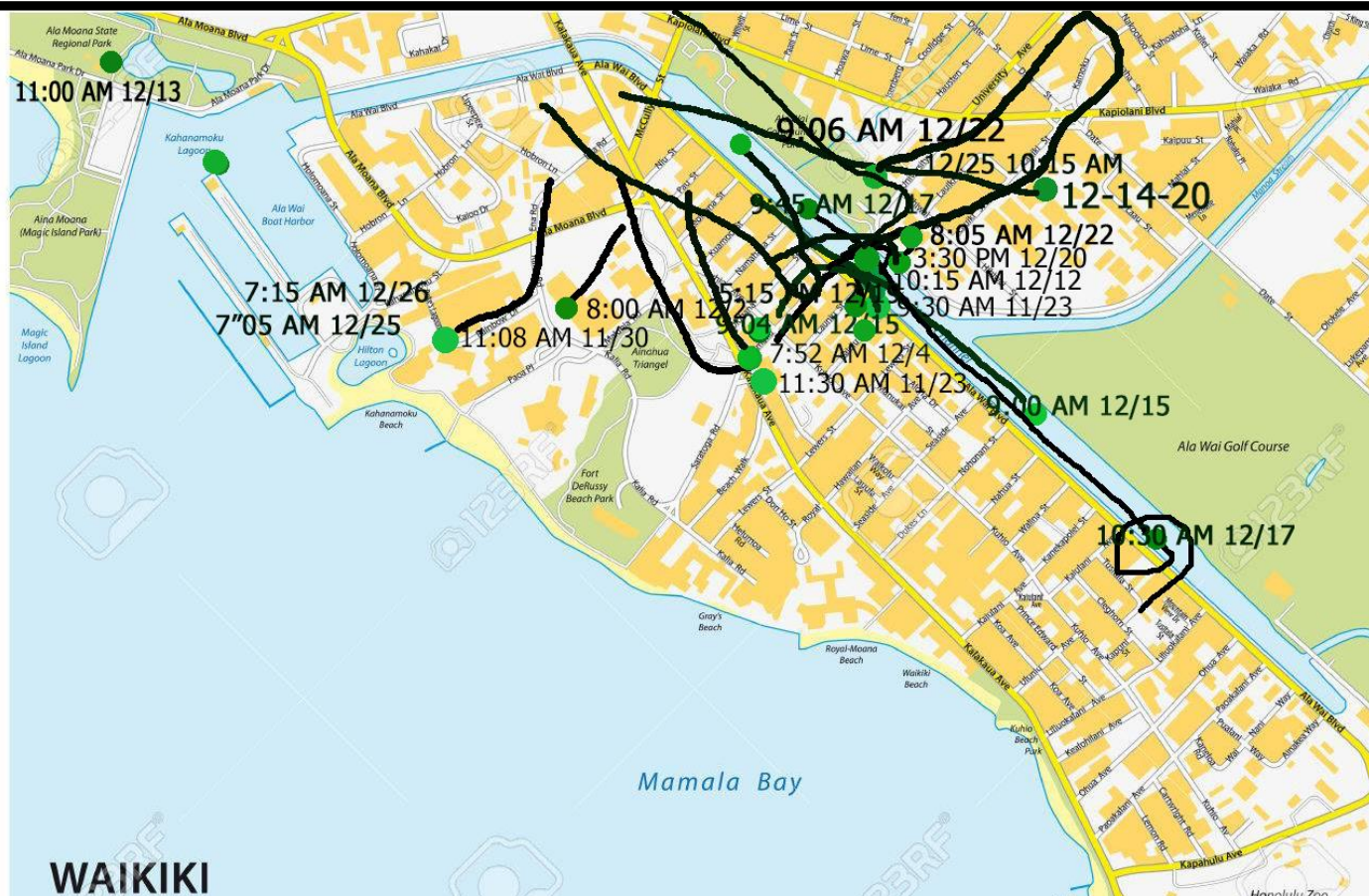


Figure 1: Flight routes of HHV Peregrine Falcon during November/December 2020.

Several times I watched the falcon drop below the ribbon into a likely basin that held fresh rainwater and believe it was drinking or bathing. I could see these basins on Google Earth when viewing the tower. The upper ribbon was used often as a roost. On February 19, 2021 the Peregrine landed on the ribbon at 6:42 pm and remained there until 6:30 am the following morning. It flew from its roost 28 minutes before sunrise. The Peregrine was observed flying before sunrise and after sunset regularly; perhaps assisted by the extra light available in Waikiki from all the buildings.

Peregrine Falcons have visited Hawai‘i annually since 1980 (Pyle 2016), but they are considered somewhat rare with only 1-3 individuals observed each year. Most sightings are very brief and last only a few minutes before the bird disappears. In the northwestern Hawaiian Islands, several overwintering Peregrines have been well documented. An adult Peregrine was recorded on Laysan Island for 76 days from January 27, 2009 - April 14, 2009 (Reynolds *et.al.* 2015) and a juvenile Peregrine was also on Laysan for 134 days from November 4, 2011 - March 17, 2012 (Rutt 2017). Peregrine Falcons occasionally overwinter in the southeastern Hawaiian Islands (Pyle 2016) but none of these have ever been documented on a daily basis for an extended

period. On March 31, 2021, I observed the falcon perched at the HHV. I did not see it again until April 15, 2021. I thought it had left O‘ahu, but amazingly, after not being observed for two weeks, it re-appeared and stayed in Waikiki until May 6, 2021. This report summarizes the record-breaking, longest duration (164 days) for an overwintering Peregrine Falcon in the Hawaiian Islands.

Note* After this article was prepared for publication, incredibly, this long staying Peregrine Falcon was re-sighted at the HHV on May 31, 2021! After a 25-day absence, the falcon is continuing its extended stay on O‘ahu. A complete update to this article will be published soon.

Thanks to Peter Pyle for identifying this bird as a juvenile male Peale’s Peregrine Falcon that likely migrated here from Siberia, the Aleutian Islands, or the Canadian Alaskan maritime area.

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Next Steps in 'Alalā Recovery Include Maui Nui & 'Io Research

The following article is a press release first published by the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) on <https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/blog/2021/03/31/nr21-061/> on March 31, 2021.

(HILO) – The species recovery effort, known as The 'Alalā Project, is announcing the next steps in the recovery efforts of 'alalā (Hawaiian crow). Last October, in response to mortalities of released 'alalā, including predation by 'io (Hawaiian hawk), conservationists brought the remaining birds from the Pu'u Maka'ala Natural Area Reserve, on Hawai'i Island, back in from the wild – returning them to the conservation breeding program at the Keauhou Bird Conservation Center. Released between 2016 and 2019 and having lived in the wild for 2-3 years, these five birds gained knowledge about foraging, predator avoidance, pair bonding, and other social behaviors that could be passed on to the birds residing within the conservation breeding program and aid with future recovery efforts.

Jackie Gaudioso, a wildlife biologist with the DLNR Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW) and coordinator for The 'Alalā Project, said, "The partners of The 'Alalā Project will keep the momentum of Hawai'i Island 'alalā release planning going, as potential release areas undergo supportive habitat management and infrastructure preparations. While self-sustaining populations of 'alalā on Hawai'i Island are necessary for the long-term recovery of the species, understanding 'io behaviors and movements is crucial before we pursue future Hawai'i Island releases". As the effort to improve success of Hawai'i Island reintroductions continues, the Project has begun preliminary work to explore the potential for Maui Nui to serve as an additional release site for 'alalā. While 'alalā were historically known to inhabit forests on Hawai'i Island, there is subfossil evidence that 'alalā or a similar species once existed on Maui. Predation by 'io has been a major challenge to Hawai'i Island releases, but 'io are not present on Maui Nui, providing an opportunity to better understand how 'alalā can live in a forest where 'io are not

present. Dr. Fern Duvall, the Maui Nui program manager for the DOFAW Native Ecosystems Protection and Management Program has a long history with the 'alalā, as far back as the 1980s. "We have forests that are similar to the forest on Hawai'i Island where 'alalā were released. There are abundant food resources in our Maui Nui forests; abundant trees that would be suitable for nesting platforms.



'Alalā (Hawaiian crow), photo credit: DLNR.

And we do not have the 'io predation risk, because we don't have 'io here" Duvall said. The first steps in consideration of a reintroduction of 'alalā to Maui Nui will be a careful review and assessment of potential sites for releases, as well as outreach and discussion with conservation partners and the community to assess the feasibility of releases. In the coming months, The 'Alalā Project will be reaching out to conservation partners and community members within Maui Nui to evaluate habitat suitability and support for future releases. Hawaiian hawk ('io) research will also be conducted at the previous and at additional potential release areas on Hawai'i Island over the next few years to inform future Hawai'i Island releases and to support release implementation. The research topics include species' distribution, movements, and monitoring the behaviors of individuals. Bryce Masuda, Conservation Program Manager of the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance's Hawai'i Endangered Bird Conservation Program said, "We are excited to move forward with the next steps for the recovery of 'alalā together with the community. As we have seen with the recovery of other endangered species, successful programs must problem solve – incorporating new strategies and applying science to achieve thriving populations of wildlife."

Shorebird Farewell at Paikō Lagoon Wildlife Sanctuary

Low-Tide Reef-Walk: April 10th, 2021, 8:30-10:30 am

by HAS Board member Alice P. S. Roberts

After a year of COVID closures, we gathered at the makai end of Kuli'ou'ou Road at 8:30 am, along with the church's many ducks (mostly Mallard hybrids): light brown to classic mallard, & there was a real white Easter Duck with them:



All photo credits go to Alice Roberts.

We did not see any of the expected black Muscovy ducks with gorgeous iridescent black feathers. We saw little fuzzy ducklings later on in the artificial pond:



Of course, throughout the 2 hours we saw and heard many urban birds: mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*), finches, zebra doves (*Geopelia striata*), red-vented bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*). Our path had been changed this year, stantions and ropes marked our way. At the end of the roped path, a red-crested cardinal (*Paroaria coronata*) met us.

At the beginning, we looked at and talked about several plants like Milo (a hibiscus relative with gorgeous carving wood & bright yellow flowers in the morning which turn reddish by evening).

The coconut palms had been cut down and their logs placed along a short path, but the ironwood (*Casuarina*) still

thrived (I've been told machetes chip when cutting the wood). Most of the thorn bearing Kiawe were gone. Pickleweed ('Ākulikuli-Kai) and 'Ākulikuli with the beautiful little pink star flowers were right at the lagoon's edge. Patches of 'Aki'aki grass and Kīpūkai were scattered everywhere:



Once down on the beach; we saw some male ghost crab holes with their advertising pyramids and saw a couple of sand-colored babies scurrying into the water. The beach had changed so much during the pandemic, I could barely recognize it! Sand had been moved all over and much driftwood had relocated:



Surprisingly, we saw only a few shorebirds (we expected to see many fattening-up for their flights north in a couple weeks): 2 Kōlea, my favorite "PGPs" or pacific golden-plovers (*Pluvialis fulva*) and 1 wandering tattler ('Ūlili, *Tringa incana*) flew into view calling its Hawaiian name "ulili-ulili-ulili-ulili" - I wonder if it was the one I usually see/hear there. We saw several ruddy turnstones ('Akekeke/Keke, *Arenaria interpres*) doing their stone flipping thing out on the sand bar. In flight, we saw several white terns (Manu-O-Kū, *Gygis alba*) and several cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) with their s-shaped necks and legs stretched out behind. Missing was the usually seen black-crowned night-heron ('Auku'u, *Nycticorax nycticorax*).



Male Hawaiian stilt on left; female on right with slightly lighter black back

We saw two black-necked stilts (Ae‘o/Kukuluae‘o, *Himantopus mexicanus knudseni*) on the sandbar and later heard them flying over us with their red legs trailing, settling into the artificial pond.

In the water (tide was a nice low -0.2 foot) we saw a couple schools of little mullet (‘ama‘ama) and lots of teeny tiny gobies, a family of fish with pelvic fins fused as suction cups for jumping from puddle to puddle (some climb waterfalls on their spawning return to freshwater streams of their birth). We found a whole swimming crab molt (10 legs with the last pair paddle-shaped) and a box crab carapace; we usually see many more crabs and quickly saw a little beige mantis shrimp disappear into a hole. We saw very little limu of any kind. Of course, as we returned to our starting point, we collected some trash.



Top left to right: ducklings, mama, bottom left to right: female kōlea, ruddy turnstone

For those of you that have been to Paikō with me before, we found a couple “tongues”, but NO “sand balls”. Shhhh, don’t tell those who might go for their first time in September → Will I see you at our next field trip to Paikō Lagoon on Saturday, September 18, 2021, on Kuli‘ou‘ou Road at 8 am? Email me: MermaidsHI@aol.com.

Aloha, Alice

Reclassification of the Hawaiian Stilt

On March 25, 2021, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) proposed to downlist the Hawaiian stilt from endangered to threatened: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/03/25/2021-05846/endangered-and-threatened-wildlife-and-plants-reclassification-of-the-hawaiian-stilt-from-endangered>. HAS Board member Susan Scott submitted the following comments:

The Hawaii Audubon Society opposes the proposed downlisting of the Ae‘o (*Himantopus mexicanus knudseni*). The primary threat to Ae‘o recovery is a severe shortage of protected nesting areas. The USFWS has yet to identify critical nesting habitat. After 50 years on the endangered species list, proactive effort is needed to enable the Ae‘o to recover and thrive. At the very least, critical nesting habitat needs to be identified and designated as required by ESA Section 4(a)(1)(A), and (3)(A) and Section 4(b)(1)(A).

The Ae‘o has been listed by the USFWS as an endangered species since 1967 and is on the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) State of the Birds Watch List as a species at risk of becoming threatened or endangered without conservation action. Ae‘o numbers have risen slightly in the last 30 years, but there are less than 2,000 stilts in the entire State. Recovery is tenuous because of diminishing nesting habitat due to urban development. Ae‘o forage in a variety of aquatic habitats, primarily at lower elevations, but nesting is limited to few areas by water depth and vegetation cover. In the last 110 years, approximately 47 percent of Hawai‘i’s coastal plain wetlands have been lost due to construction and dredging projects, as well as a shift from wetland agriculture to other agriculture. Loss of natural wetland habitat, and a decline in aquatic agriculture lands, has caused a decrease in Ae‘o numbers, leaving few habitats for the birds to nest. In addition, the quality of the wetland habitat that remains is in jeopardy, due to urban development, flood control, and provision of municipal water sources. **Downlisting the Ae‘o will diminish protection for remaining habitat.**

Other threats are non-native invasive plant species and predators. Pickleweed (*Batis maritima*), water hyacinth (*Eichornia crassipes*), and mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*) reduce viable nesting habitat within wetland areas by limiting open water, mudflats, and shallows. Rats, mongoose, cattle egrets, owls, bullfrogs, and roaming cats and dogs depredate Ae‘o in all stages of its life cycle.

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 Hawai'i 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

Upcoming Events and Field Trips

For regular updates, go to

<http://www.hawaiiadubon.org/get-outside>

Welcome Home to Shorebirds

Paikō Lagoon Wildlife Sanctuary

September 18, 2021, 8 am, meet on Kuli'ou'ou Road

Enjoy fall at Paikō! Let's welcome our unique and beautiful migratory shorebirds as they return from their extensive travel to enjoy the Hawaiian Islands for the fall and winter months.

RSVP: MermaidsHI@aol.com

Leader: Alice Roberts

28th Hawai'i Conservation Conference

July 27 –29, 2021, virtual

This year's theme is Kūlia i ka huliau — Striving for change. To register and for more information, go to <https://www.hawaiiconservation.org/conference/2021-conservation-conference>

Freeman Seabird Preserve Update

It's a girl! This year was the first time since 2007 that a Kōlea was being seen regularly at the preserve! The bird has been observed since last November by our dedicated volunteers. It was confirmed to be a female and left in late spring to presumably migrate to the North.

The skies are empty and the forest is quiet.

Is it too late to save our native forest birds? Watch now on YouTube as experts talk about the rapidly declining forest bird populations on Kaua'i and across the islands; this touching conversation took place June 4 as part of the 4th virtual "Forest Friday" hosted by the Kaua'i Invasive Species Committee and Kaua'i Forest Bird Recovery Project: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wTA1yDJ-d0>

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CORRIGENDUM

Eliot Carter, author of the “Lovebird Essay” in the ‘Elepaio 81:3 May/June 2021 wishes to correct the following:

The text reads: “However, several of the color types bred in captivity are present in the feral Maui population, such as blue, yellow, and grey. One type I observed is almost certainly a hybrid between the yellow and wild types: mostly green with intermixed yellow feathers”.

The text should read: “However, several of the color types bred in captivity are present in the feral Maui population, such as blue, yellow, grey and a blotchy intermediate type between the yellow and wild types, called "pied" in the avicultural world.”

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