



‘ELEPAIO

VOLUME 86, NUMBER 2

Journal of the Hawai‘i Audubon Society

MARCH/APRIL 2026

STATE OF THE SOCIETY: Annual Report for 2025

By Susan Scott, President

January 1, 2025 was the start of a banner year for the Society, thanks in large part to Keith Swindle joining us as executive director. With Keith’s exceptional leadership, we greatly expanded the Society’s mission of education, conservation, and appreciation of birds throughout the state. As an avid birder, Keith also keeps high on his priority list Hawai‘i Audubon’s vision of finding joy in birds.

PARTNERSHIPS

HAS began in 1939 on O‘ahu as the Honolulu Audubon Society, but quickly recognized the need to be a statewide organization. We continue to serve neighbor islands thanks to Kona resident, Mike Carion, who joined the Board of Directors several years ago and maintains an active [HAS Big Island hui](#).

Keith’s widespread connections continued our growth by introducing the board to Maui biologist Jay Penniman of the Maui Nui Seabird Recovery Project to the Society. Jay joined the Board of Directors this year and will be sharing his knowledge and guidance while representing Maui Nui, which includes Maui, Moloka‘i, Lāna‘i, and Kaho‘olawe.

In addition, we now have a productive working relationship with several Kaua‘i-based organizations. We are working closely with Helen Raine, the Conservation Coordinator for Pacific Birds Habitat Joint Venture, to inform, protect, and celebrate our endemic ‘alae ‘ula. Today, a mere 700 birds remain on O‘ahu and Kaua‘i only.



‘Alae ‘ula adult and chicks. ©Hob Osterlund

Also, thanks to Keith’s efforts, the Board of Land Natural Resources approved the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between HAS and Hawai‘i’s Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Forestry and Wildlife. This agreement formalizes “a cooperative relationship to advance the study, protection, and education relating to Hawai‘i’s indigenous bird species and their habitats across Hawai‘i.”

HAS continued our sponsorship of Hawai‘i Public Radio’s program, “[Manu Minute](#)” created by Patrick Hart of UH Hilo.

HAWAII BIRD CRISIS FUND (HBCF)

Keith started HBCF to raise money to use for birds in crisis, meaning when sudden funding cuts cancel planned programs, or other emergencies threaten native species. By July, we raised about \$10,000. Fundraising includes monthly donors,

artist merchandise sales, and a GoFundMe campaign. We thank our loyal members and supporters for their generous contributions.



Hawai'i Bird Crisis Fundraiser graphic by Elena Arinaga

Shortly after establishing the HBCF, federal funds were abruptly cut from the long-planned Laysan Finch translocation project, where the finch population on low-lying Pearl & Hermes Atoll was in danger of being extirpated by overwash of a single winter storm. Thanks to the HBCF, HAS was able to provide critical funds on short notice



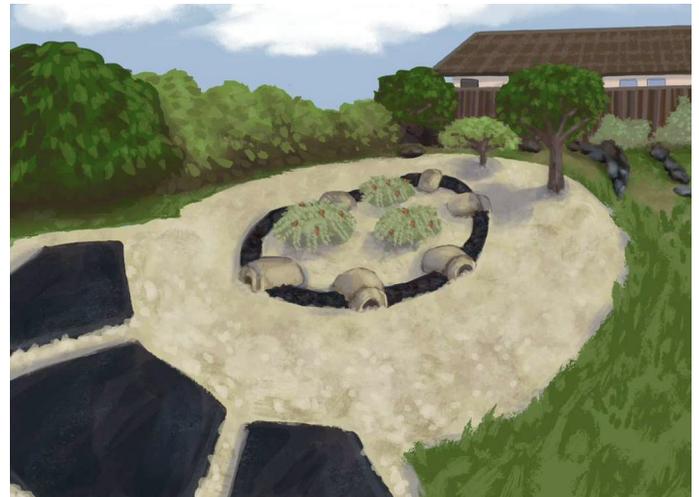
Biologists release 'ekupu'u into restored habitat on Eastern Island during the July 2025 translocation. ©Dan Rapp, USFWS

and the logistically complex project was launched. One hundred Laysan Finches were rescued and translocated to Midway Atoll's Eastern Island where the finches have already successfully reared some chicks and are building a critical insurance population (see the [July/August, 2025](#) issue of 'Elepaio). Civil Beat highlighted the Laysan Finch operation as an example of how community-driven funding can save species at risk.

The fund strengthened HAS partnerships with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Kaua'i Wildlife Coalition, and nonprofits such as American Bird Conservancy, Pacific Rim Conservation, Friends of Hakalau, Friends of Kaua'i Refuges, Friends of Northwest Hawaiian Islands.

FREEMAN SEABIRD PRESERVE (FSP)

We saw a record high count of 587 Wedge-tailed Shearwater nests on our one-acre HAS-owned property in O'ahu's Black Point community. The Board approved a long-term management plan drafted by then Operations Manager Laura Doucette (who has since moved on), Keith Swindle,



Artist's rendering of Phase 1 of FSP's long-term management plan. ©Kelly Furuya

Susan Scott, and Rich Downs. We hired Pua Lani Landscaping Design (PLLD), a company working with Black Point neighbors, to implement Phase 1 of the project which involved about 15% of the one-acre seabird colony. PLLD planted two heliotrope trees, installed an automated irrigation system, and

created a safe and secure space for parking, education, walking, and working.

Phase 1 was largely completed in late January and will enable several future goals identified in the management plan to take shape, including the ability for the Hui Manu-o-Kū to host a manu o Kū chick rescue and fledgling support program. This will supplement rehabilitation efforts by Hawai'i Wildlife Center at the Honolulu Zoo. Phase 2 will include buying a solar-powered fish freezer for feeding tern chicks, as well as a small, secure storage shed in which to keep supplies.

Board member and White Tern expert, Rich Downs, will manage a volunteer schedule, for taking care of the terns. Control of cats, rats, dogs and mongooses is paramount and ongoing.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

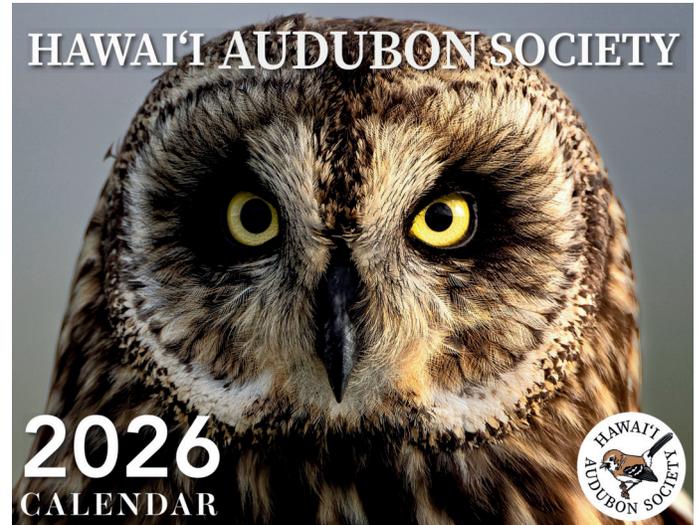
Elena Arinaga, our extraordinary outreach coordinator, engaged thousands of residents and visitors through newsletters, 41 community events, and educational programming at 20 K-12 schools on three islands, as well as frequent social media postings. (Newsletters are saved on our website [here](#).)



HAS Outreach Manager, Elena Arinaga, teaching 3rd grade students about kōlea at Reverend Benjamin Parker Elementary School. ©Laura Zoller

Among countless other efforts on behalf of HAS, Elena:

- organized a "pop-up" Great Backyard Bird Count event at Honolulu's Magic Island,
- was accepted into the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) IDEAL Program,



Cover page of our 2026 HAS calendar featuring the winning pūeo photo by Leighton Lum.

- created and managed a popular "Welcome Home Kōlea" festival at Magic Island,
- hosted over 30 education booths in community and school events,
- arranged our annual meeting/dinner at Bishop Museum's Atherton Hālau including a special mele and presentation by her hālau hula. (Sold out at 120 guests.)
- co-created and conducted a popular online bird photo contest. The winning photos were used by Laura Doucette for the 2026 HAS calendar (we still have a few calendars for [sale](#) at reduced price).

BIRD WALKS

This year HAS organized 22 birding experiences to connect people with the joy of Hawai'i's birds in both urban and rural areas. These included Hawai'i Island walks organized and led by Nicole and Mike Carion, manu o Kū conservation and education walks in Honolulu led by Rich Downs and other walks on O'ahu led by Keith Swindle.



Students of Kamehameha Schools Hawai‘i, Kauluhala Summer School with Mike and Nicole Carion at the Kaulana Manu Nature Trail. ©Mike Carion

KŌLEA QUEST 2025, NOME, ALASKA

Thanks to the continued organizing skills of board member Wendy Kuntz, a total of 20 participants visited Nome, Alaska for our third annual successful Kōlea Quest trip.



2025 Kōlea Quest participants in Nome, Alaska. ©Wendy Kuntz

In Nome we explored Arctic breeding grounds of birds and other wildlife, expertly guided, once again, by Carol Gales, of Roam Nome. Two of Wendy’s KCC students were able to join the group on HAS-sponsored scholarships.

KŌLEA COUNT CITIZEN SCIENCE PROJECT

Kōlea Count began its fifth year starting July 1, 2025 with Pacific Golden-Plover returns to Hawai‘i. Rich Downs is coordinating ArcGIS

mapping integration of the data to identify migration hot spots, track annual trends, and engage the public.

Compiled data shows the timing and scale of migration and habitat use, as well as increasing volunteer participation.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT (CBC)

HAS thanks Thane Pratt for his more than 20 years of service as the Regional Editor for the CBC for Hawai‘i and the Pacific Islands regions. Thane is retiring from that role after compilation of the 2025 count and asked HAS to identify replacements.

Mahalo nui to Richard May, Pete Donaldson, Jay Penniman and all other count coordinators for organizing Hawai‘i in this 125th CBC. Special thanks to HAS’s Elena Arinaga for coordinating Hawai‘i’s role in this longest-running citizen science project in the U.S.

HUI MANU-O-KŪ

The society continued to support and participate in this grassroots group to protect and monitor manu o Kū (White Terns), Honolulu’s official bird. This year, and in partnership with a number of organizations we succeeded in getting a competitive grant of over \$16,000 from DOFAW’s



Justin Donahue (Donahue Arborist LLC) leading a tree trimming demonstration during the arborist workshop at KCC. ©Elena Arinaga

Kaulunani Urban and Community Forest Program which enabled us to teach 40 arborists, tree trimmers and a number of college students on how to trim trees occupied by breeding terns (see the January/February 2026 issue of *'Elepaio*).

Other highlights, led by board member and white tern researcher, Rich Downs, were nest mapping and tern tours. Rich, Keith, and Elena shared leadership roles with the managers of Conservation Council for Hawai'i in coordinating the Manu o Kū Festival, held on 'Iolani Palace grounds in May. HAS is one of the sponsors of this popular event.



HAS mascots Aloha Kea and Kōlea Nui with other mascots at the 2025 Manu o Kū Festival. ©Elena Arinaga

ADVOCACY AND POLICY WORK

Through Keith, HAS submitted testimony to Maui Lighting Ordinance to protect endangered species and dark sky resources. He also reviewed and commented on state and national proposals for feral cat legislation and other initiatives that supported, or too often, threatened bird conservation.

This year we upgraded HAS to “Bronze Seal of Transparency” in GuideStar, the world's largest, most comprehensive database of U.S. nonprofit organizations. This site shows potential donors

that HAS is compliant with laws for nonprofits, and transparent.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

HAS currently has 12 Directors. The three officers are myself, Susan Scott, serving as President and Treasurer; Elizabeth Kumabe-Maynard as Vice President, and Wendy Johnson as Secretary.

Serving on O'ahu are John Harrison, Pat Moriyasu, Rich Downs, Alice Roberts, Yvonne Chan, Wendy Kuntz, and Colleen Soares.

Representing Hawai'i Island is Mike Carion, and representing Maui Nui is Jay Penniman

Our outstanding volunteers who help keep us legal, accountable, and reachable are David Johnson, JD; Rhea Reed, CPA; and Laura Zoller. Rich Downs continues to answer all calls to HAS on his personal mobile phone for which we are all grateful.

CONCLUSION

The Hawai'i Audubon Society's 2025 achievements show a year of remarkable growth, innovation, and community impact. Through our bird programs and public outreach, we connected thousands of residents, students, and visitors with Hawai'i's birds.

These accomplishments fulfill HAS's mission of connecting people with the joy of birds by sponsoring community science projects, organizing habitat restoration, leading field trips, providing information for local and visiting birders of all ages, and advocating for local conservation issues. This linking of science, culture, and community lays a foundation for future growth, ensuring that Hawai'i's birds and ecosystems continue to be protected and celebrated for generations to come.

*** *END* ***

Blue Rock-Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*) & Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) — Firsts for Hawai‘i

By Keith Swindle

A Blue Rock-Thrush was sighted near Dillingham Airfield on O‘ahu in late November 2025, representing the first record of this species for the state of Hawai‘i (Swick 2025a). The immature bird, which was still being observed as of late January 2026 (Swick 2026a, 2026b), is an Asian vagrant of the *philippensis* subspecies — the only one of five subspecies with rufous-chestnut underparts.



Blue Rock-Thrush. ©Eric VanderWerf

The Blue Rock-Thrush breeds across southern Europe, northwest Africa, and from Central Asia to northern China, Japan, and Malaysia (Collar 2020). The *philippensis* subspecies is the most migratory of the group, which likely accounts for its tendency to appear as a vagrant on the Pacific fringe of North America and now Hawai‘i. The O‘ahu bird has been rated ABA Code 5 (Accidental) and has drawn considerable attention from birders.



Brown Pelican. ©Sherman Wing

A Brown Pelican nicknamed Kiko was spotted on 22 January 2026 at Punalu‘u Beach off Hawai‘i Island’s south shore, marking what appears to be the first modern record of this species reaching the Hawaiian Islands

(KITV 2026, Pyle and Pyle 2017). The bird is estimated to be roughly 2,300 miles from the nearest known Brown Pelican habitat along the Pacific Coast of the Americas.

Because Brown Pelicans are not known to stray far from their breeding range, how Kiko made the journey to Hawai‘i remains uncertain. Traven Apiki, who tracks the bird through the Instagram account @KikoThePelican, considers a nonstop flight unlikely and suggests the bird may have hitched a ride on an ocean-going vessel before departing once it reached the Hawaiian coastline (KITV 2026). The Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources has stated that the pelican poses no threat to the local ecosystem and that there are no plans to capture or return it to the mainland (KITV 2026).

LITERATURE CITED

Collar, N. 2020. Blue Rock-Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, and E. de Juana, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.burthr.01>

KITV. 2026. Stuck in paradise: Non-native brown pelican spotted along Hawai‘i Island’s south shore. *Island News*, 4 February 2026. https://www.kitv.com/news/stuck-in-paradise-non-native-brown-pelican-spotted-along-hawai-i-island-s-south-shore/article_0cf7c226-44e2-4515-b6ba-a0cd3caee807.html

Pyle, R. L., and P. Pyle. 2017. *The Birds of the Hawaiian Islands: Occurrence, History, Distribution, and Status*. B.P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu, HI. Version 2 (1 January 2017). <http://hbs.bishopmuseum.org/birds/rfp-monograph/>

Swick, N. 2024, 2025a, 2026a, 2026b. Rare Bird Alert: April 26, 2024. American Birding Association. <https://www.aba.org/rare-bird-alert-april-26-2024/>, ...-december-5-2025/, ...-january-9-2026/, ...-january-23-2025/

* * * E N D * * *

Hawai'i Audubon Society Donations and Membership

Founded in 1939, Hawai'i Audubon Society is an independent nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Make a donation in any amount at <https://hiaudubon.org/donate/>

Your membership expires one year after you join or renew.

All memberships include digital delivery of 'Elepaio by email at no additional cost.

Members who wish to receive 'Elepaio by mail may add a \$50 annual print option.

Renew your membership by choosing your level on our website: <https://hiaudubon.org/membership>

If you have any questions or need assistance, please email membership@hiaudubon.org

Please make checks payable to: Hawai'i Audubon Society.

Choose your Hawai'i Audubon Society membership level: Choose your delivery preference:

\$15 Student Membership

Digital delivery by email (included at no extra charge)

\$35 Regular Membership

Preferred email: _____

\$65 Family Membership

Print delivery by mail - add \$50 annually

\$100 Supporting Membership

Mailing address: _____

\$1,000 Lifetime Membership

Mahalo for helping us inspire people to love and protect birds.

Announcements

As of January 1, 2026, updated membership rates and subscription options are in effect, reflecting rising production and mailing costs while supporting our conservation, research, and education work statewide.

Membership rates:

Regular Membership: \$35 | Family Membership: \$65

Print 'Elepaio option:

Print copies of the 'Elepaio are available for a \$50 annual fee; digital delivery remains free for members with an email address on file.

Members renewing in 2026 will see these options reflected at renewal. More information is available at hiaudubon.org/membership, or by contacting membership@hiaudubon.org.

Stay up-to-date by visiting us online:

Kōlea Count: www.koleacount.org

Hui Manu-o-Kū: www.whiteterns.org

Freeman Seabird Preserve: freemanseabirdpreserve.org

Social Media:

facebook.com/HawaiiAudubonSociety/

facebook.com/groups/hawaii.audubon.big.island.hui

instagram.com/hawaiiaudubonsociety/

instagram.com/hawaii_audubon_big_island/



Events

March 10: Pilina Kanaloa 2026: Ocean Day at the Hawai'i State Capitol (O'ahu)

April 4: 'Alae 'ula launch event at Kukui Grove Shopping Mall (Kaua'i)

April 22: Earth Day at Keālia Pond National Wildlife Refuge (Maui)

May 2: Manu o Kū Festival on the grounds of 'Iolani Palace (O'ahu)

For more details, event additions, and updates visit: hiaudubon.org/events or email events@hiaudubon.org

'Elepaio ISSN 0013-6069

Managing Editor: Elena Arinaga

Scientific Editor: Eric VanderWerf, PhD

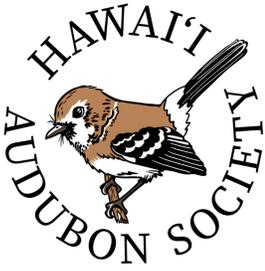
The 'Elepaio is printed on recycled paper and published six times per year.

Hawai'i Audubon Society

850 Richards St, Suite 505, Honolulu, HI 96813

events@hiaudubon.org <https://hiaudubon.org>





HAWAII AUDUBON SOCIETY
850 RICHARDS ST, SUITE 505
HONOLULU, HI 96813-4709

<https://hiaudubon.org>
office@hiaudubon.org
events@hiaudubon.org

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

MEMBERSHIP EXPIRATION DATE:

'ELEPAIO • 86:2 • MARCH/APRIL 2026

HAWAII BIRD CRISIS FUND

The Bird Crisis Fund was created to support urgent bird conservation efforts impacted by federal funding cuts and to fill critical gaps.

100% of funds raised go directly towards bird conservation.

Help spread the word and if you are able, please consider donating to the fund.

Donate here and find out more:
<https://tinyurl.com/birdcrisisfund>

**Keep cats
Safe indoors**



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| State of the Society: Annual Report for 2025 | 13 |
| Blue Rock-Thrush (<i>Monticola solitarius</i>) & Brown Pelican (<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>) — Firsts for Hawai'i | 18 |

GO PAPERLESS, GO GREEN

Help reduce costs and our environmental footprint by choosing digital delivery. Members with an email address on file receive the 'Elepaio digitally at no additional cost.

Interested in switching?
Email membership@hiaudubon.org