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## Migratory Birds

# Koloa Mōhā or Northern Shoveler

*Anas clypeata*

**SPECIES STATUS:**  
State recognized as Indigenous

**SPECIES INFORMATION:** The koloa mōhā, or northern shoveler, is a common North American dabbling duck (Family: Anatidae) that winters in the Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI), typically arriving in September and October and departing for Alaska by March or April. By virtue of their unusually large flat bills, koloa mōhā are adapted to a diet primarily of aquatic invertebrates such as water fleas (*Daphnia* spp.) and crustaceans (copepods and ostracods), which they obtain by filtration. In addition to nektonic prey, however, koloa mōhā are also known to eat seeds and gastropods. Like many ducks, koloa mōhā are sexually dichromatic in plumage, with breeding males sporting a dark green head, white throat, and brown belly, in contrast to the females' more uniform mottled brown plumage. Koloa mōhā are less gregarious than other dabbling ducks, are among the most territorial during breeding, and maintain pair bonds longer than other similar species. They are known to hybridize with at least three other North American duck species (blue-winged and cinnamon teals, and muscovy ducks) and with several other species in Eurasia.

**DISTRIBUTION:** Common throughout the southern and western United States and Mexico during the winter, shifting to the northernmost central U.S., west central Canada, and Alaska during the breeding season. Koloa mōhā are also common through Eurasia. In Hawai'i, koloa mōhā have been sighted routinely on all of the MHI, but have not been recorded in the NWHI.

**ABUNDANCE:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service surveys from 1955 through 1995 yield an average breeding population estimate of approximately 1.87 million birds in North America, with a rising trend through the mid-1990s. Estimates for 1994 and 1995 were high at approximately three million. The most abundant dabbling duck wintering in the MHI (mallards are year-round residents), koloa mōhā numbers in State waterbird surveys from 1986 to 2003 averaged  $296 \pm 30.4$  (SE) birds. There is some evidence of a downward trend of about ten birds per year over that period.

**LOCATION AND CONDITION OF KEY HABITAT:** During winter, koloa mōhā utilize a variety of wetland habitats, including freshwater and saline marshes, and agricultural ponds. They prefer shallow open lakes containing dense growth of aquatic vegetation, and tend not to forage on dry land. In Mexico, they are known to inhabit coastal lagoons, estuaries, and some mangrove swamps. Some of these areas are already protected, but much habitat has been lost to development.

**THREATS:** Primary threats include the following:

- Loss of wetland habitat to development, pollution, or habitat-modifying invasive plants.
- Avian disease.

**CONSERVATION ACTIONS:** To protect the ability of wintering American koloa mōhā to survive while in Hawai'i and to return in good condition to breeding grounds in North America, statewide and island-specific conservation actions should include:

- Protection of current habitat.
- Protection and restoration of additional wetland habitat, especially where it can be reclaimed from abandoned urban or agricultural uses.

**MONITORING:** Continue surveys of population and distribution in known and likely habitats.

**RESEARCH PRIORITIES:** Little study of visiting koloa mōhā has been undertaken, probably in part because of their annual presence and numbers are uncertain. Research priorities should include the following:

- Better understanding of habitat needs and preferences, including foraging and population limiting factors.
- Increased understanding of movements of individuals that overfly the Hawaiian Islands.

**References:**

Dubowy PL. 1996. Northern shoveler (*Anas clypeata*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 217 (Poole A, Gill F, editors). Philadelphia, (PA): The Academy of Natural Sciences; and Washington DC: The American Ornithologists' Union.