



Photo: Mark Collins

Forest Birds

Kaua'i 'Ō'ō

Moho braccatus

SPECIES STATUS:

Federally listed as Endangered

State listed as Endangered

State recognized as Endemic

NatureServe Heritage Rank GH – Possibly extinct

IUCN Red List Ranking – Extinct

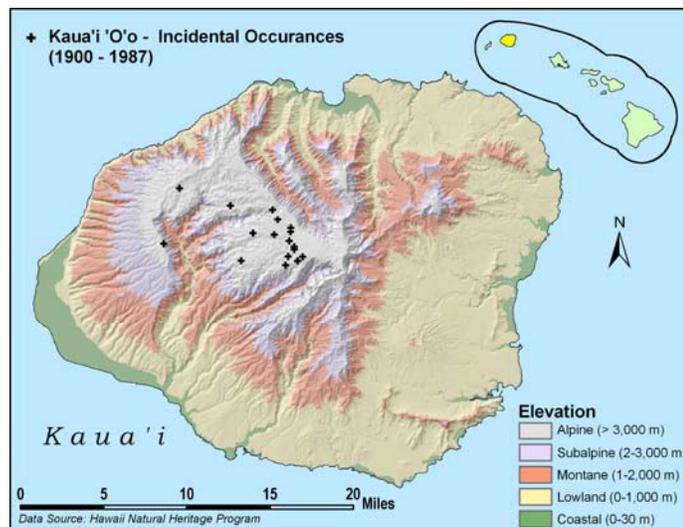
Draft Revised Recovery Plan for Hawaiian

Forest Birds – USFWS 2003

SPECIES INFORMATION: Endemic to its namesake, the Kaua'i 'ō'ō is the smallest of the five known species of Hawaiian honeyeaters (Family: Meliphagidae), and has the least gaudy plumage of the four Hawaiian species of *Moho*. 'Ō'ō eat a variety of arthropods, snails, 'ōlapa (*Cheirodendron* spp.) fruits, and nectar from the flowers of 'ōhi'a (*Metrosideros polymorpha*), lobelia, as well as other species. Early naturalists reported the species extensively feeding on the flower bracts of 'ie'ie (*Freycinetia arborea*), a species abundant in lowland forests, but not in upper elevation forests. Little is known about the species' breeding biology. The only known nests were in cavities in large 'ōhi'a snags.

DISTRIBUTION: Unknown. Possibly extinct. The species was last observed in stream valleys of the central Alaka'i Wilderness Preserve. Historically, the Kaua'i 'ō'ō occurred in forest habitat throughout the island.

ABUNDANCE: The Kaua'i 'ō'ō was last observed in 1987, and may be extinct. Extensive surveys in 1989, 1994, 1996, and 2000 did not detect the species. The species was very common up to the end of 19th century.



LOCATION AND CONDITION OF KEY HABITAT: Unknown. The last sightings of the Kaua'i 'ō'ō were in dense 'ōhi'a forests of the Alaka'i swamp. Ironically, this habitat may have been low-quality or marginal 'ō'ō habitat. 'Ie'ie, an important food plant, common in the lower elevation forests previously occupied by 'ō'ō, is not found in the upper elevations forests where the species was last observed. Extensive damage to forests by hurricanes in 1982 and 1992 may have further reduced the suitability of high-elevation forests, especially given the species'

apparent dependence on large snags for nest sites. The area where the species was last observed is managed by the State of Hawai'i as a Wilderness Preserve.

THREATS: Unknown. However, the Kaua'i 'ō'ō was likely susceptible to the same factors that threaten other native Hawaiian forest birds, including: loss and degradation of habitat, predation by introduced mammals, and disease. For Kaua'i 'ō'ō populations, the following likely were of particular concern:

- Disease. The precipitous decline of all Hawaiian *Moho* species suggests that disease played a role in the species' decline.
- Hunting. Although other 'ō'ō species were historically exploited by Native Hawaiians for their feathers, the role this activity played in the decline of the Kaua'i 'ō'ō is equivocal, but likely minimal given the species' plumage.

CONSERVATION ACTIONS: If the species persists, it likely benefits from management activities designed to conserve other endangered forest birds on Kaua'i, including the establishment of the Alaka'i Wilderness Preserve, regular surveys of forest bird populations, monitoring of habitat conditions, studies of disease and disease vectors, control of feral ungulates through public hunting, and public education efforts featuring Kauai's endangered forest birds. Should this species be rediscovered, the Rare Bird Recovery Protocol outlined in the USFWS Draft Revised Recovery Plan for Hawaiian Forest Birds would be implemented, and management in anticipation of that possibility should include:

- Continue protection and management of wildlife sanctuaries and refuges.

MONITORING: Continue forest bird surveys and habitat monitoring on all islands. This information is needed to assess the efficacy of habitat management efforts.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES: Research priorities for most Hawaiian forest birds include developing improved methods for controlling rats (*Rattus* spp.) and feral cats (*Felis silvestris*) in native forests, determining the ecological requirements of *Culex* mosquitoes at mid- and high-elevation forests, and developing methods to control mosquito populations. Given that this species is likely extinct there are no research priorities specific to Kaua'i 'ō'ō.

References:

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2003. Draft revised Recovery plan for Hawaiian forest birds. Portland, (OR): U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 428 pp.