



## Saving Native Hawaiian Forest Birds Is In All Our Hands

### What is a forest bird?

Forest birds are smaller than hawks, owls or geese, usually just a few inches from the tips of the tail to the bill. They nest and feed in shrubs and trees.

Many are brightly colored and have unique songs.

### What makes them special?

The ancestors of today's Hawaiian forest birds arrived many thousands of years ago by accident, maybe caught up in storms while flying. To survive, they adapted what they ate and over time, even their beaks changed to take advantage of different foods. Without many predators, different species developed, sometimes living in just one area of one island. All of the birds celebrated in the **Makahiki o Nā Manu Nahele** are endemic to the Hawaiian Islands, found here and nowhere else in the world. They are irreplaceable.

### What's happening to them, why are they so rare?

Hawaiian forest birds once lived all the way down to the sea. Mosquitoes spread diseases between birds, so when they were accidentally brought to Hawai'i, the birds could only survive where the mosquitoes could not reach them, high in the mountains. Cats, mongooses and rats eat eggs and kill adult birds. Deer, goats, sheep and pigs destroy forest bird habitats. Hawai'i once had over 84 different species of forest birds. Today only 26 survive, and several may go extinct in just a few years.

### How can you help?

- Keep cats indoors!
- Make sure mosquitoes cannot breed in standing water around your home or school.
- Teach each other about our native forest birds.
- Create and fly a flock of origami Hawaiian forest birds to help raise awareness!



### Why do forest birds have different looks and calls?

Forest birds can see colors, unlike hawks and owls, so bright feathers and patterns help them recognize other birds that may be either friends, mates or competitors. Calls and songs also communicate these things in the forest. Different bill shapes allow each species to eat something different from others.

### What do they do for us?

Honeycreepers that specialize in eating nectar pollinate flowering trees and shrubs. Seed-eating forest birds help spread seeds. Insect-eating forest birds control insects and recycle nutrients. And all of them use lichens and mosses for building nests. Their feeding and nesting work makes the forest more productive and healthy, making more oxygen and storing more fresh water – things all creatures need, including people! Hawaiian forest birds are important in Hawaiian *mo'olelo*, *mele*, *oli*, *hula*. They have long been considered *kinolau*.



Students across Hawai‘i are asked to create one origami of a native Hawaiian forest bird from their island for the **Makahiki o Nā Manu Nahele**, to inspire each community to learn about and care for our precious forest gems!

## How should my Nihoa Finch origami look?

Nihoa Finches are about five inches long, with a strong, short cone-shaped beak. Beak and legs are black. Males are bright yellow on their heads and chest, with patches on their wings, and gray-black underneath. Females are brownish with some yellow on the chest and belly.

More on Nihoa Finch:

<https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/wildlife/birds/nihoa-finch/>



photo:  
Eric VanderWerf

photo:  
Jack Jeffery



## Nihoa Finch (*Telespiza ultima*)

Nihoa Finch are omnivores, which means they eat a variety of things. Their strong beak can crack seeds, and they eat insects, roots, leaves, flowers, even other bird's eggs. Nihoa has few trees and short shrubs, so these finches are unusual because they nest on the ground. Introduced grasshoppers and plants also impact the native plants and ultimately, Nihoa Finches. If introduced rats and mice stow away on a boat, that will be a problem for Nihoa Finches, because they eat eggs and as well as the plants. Bigger storms and sea level rise with climate change are also new threats.

Conservationists tried moving some to Tern Island in the 1980s to create an "insurance" population, but they did not survive. They are considered critically endangered because their habitat on Nihoa is only about 63 acres, and they are endemic, found nowhere else in the world.