



Saving Native Hawaiian Forest Birds Is In All Of Our Hands

What is a forest bird?

Most forest birds are smaller than chickens, seabirds or geese, usually just a few inches from the tips of the tail to the bill. Most nest, rest 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 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 native flowering trees and shrubs. Seed-eating forest birds help spread seeds. Insect-eating birds control insects and recycle nutrients. Most of them use lichens and mosses for building nests. Their feeding and nesting work helps forests be 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*, and some *amaukua*.



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 ‘alalā origami look?

‘Alalā are big, about 18-20” from beak tip to tail tip. They are black everywhere including their beaks and legs, but in some light their feathers have a brown or blue tint. Their powerful beak is stout and cone-shaped. Young *alalā*: have light blue eyes that turn brown when they are adults.

More on ‘alalā:

<https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/wildlife/birds/alala/>



Photos: ‘Alalā Project



‘Alalā (*Corvus hawaiiensis*)

‘Alalā are extremely intelligent, they form long family relationships and can live up to twenty years. They make loud calls that can sound like cries, growls or squeals. They are omnivores – they can eat many things including fruits, nectar, flowers, insects and sometimes the fledglings of other birds. Most importantly for the native forests, they are also seed-eaters, helping spread seeds of native plants far and wide. Bones found in caves tell us that five different species of crows once lived across Hawai‘i nei, usually in *koa* and *ōhi‘a* forests on the leeward sides, but ‘alalā are the only ones that survive today. Predators introduced by people such as cats, mongooses and rats, as well as damage to forests done by grazing animals drove all the other Hawaiian crow species to extinction and almost wiped-out the ‘alalā too. Rapid ‘Ōhi‘a Death is a new threat since ‘alalā seem to prefer to nest in *ōhi‘a*. They are the world’s rarest crow, they are critically endangered. To save them, a handful were taken into captivity at breeding conservation centers on Hawai‘i Island and Maui and at the Panaewa Zoo. Plans are underway to release some in leeward *ōhi‘a* forests on Maui, where ‘io, the only natural predator of the ‘alalā are rare. Native forests on Maui will once again have a crow species helping spread seeds in the forests there.