



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 origami ‘alawī look?

‘Alawī are small, only about four inches long. Olive green above, paler below with a dull white throat. They have a dark gray mask over their eyes and a pale colored, narrow but straight beak and pale legs.

More on ‘alawī:

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



Photos:
Bret Mossman



‘Alawī (*Oreomystis mana*)

Found only on Hawai‘i Island (endemic), ‘alawī are insectivores, or insect-eaters, that move quietly through native shrubs and trees in search of their prey, probing up and down branches and trunks, needling through lichens. They move and feed in family groups and with other species of native insect-eating birds, cooperating instead of competing. They probably lived in wooded areas island-wide at one time but are now found only on the four highest peaks. Mosquitoes are moving higher into mountain habitats as the climate gets warmer. These non-native insects spread diseases like avian malaria that kill forest birds. Conservationists are fighting to protect ‘alawī from avian malaria by releasing male mosquitoes that cannot breed with female mosquitoes. Fewer mosquitoes in our forests means a better future for our forest birds! Fences are being built to protect forests the birds need from grazing animals, which help spread Rapid ‘Ōhi‘a Death. They are endangered.