



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'oleo, 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 Kaua‘i ‘elepaio origami look?

Kaua‘i ‘*Elepaio* are about five and one-half inches long, gray-brown above, paler below with a white rump and white bars on their dark wings. Their chest has an orange “wash” over it. Their beaks are narrow, pointed and dark like their legs.

More on Kaua‘i ‘*elepaio*:

<https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/wildlife/birds/kauai-elepaio/>



Photo: Lucas Behnke, TNC

Photo: Patrick Blake



Photo: Mitch Walters



Kaua‘i ‘elepaio (*Chasiempis sclateri*)

There are three different species of ‘*elepaio* in the Hawaiian Islands, one each on Kaua‘i, O‘ahu and Hawai‘i Island. Each are a little different from the others, but all three are different from all other insect-eating birds in Hawai‘i in the way they forage, the way they feed and look for food. They look on tree trunks and branches, in moss and lichens, but they also look on the forest floor, moving and turning leaves. And they do what the other Hawaiian birds rarely do: they hunt on the wing, catching flying insects while hovering or flying themselves. You can also tell ‘*elepaio* apart from other birds in the way they land and pose: they often lift their tails high while dropping their wings. This ‘flashes’ their white rumps and may be a visual signal to other birds who are either competitors or potential mates: “I’m ‘*elepaio*, and this is my spot!” ‘*Elepaio* are known to interact with people in the forest - perhaps we stir up insects from the forest floor when we walk. Their un-afraid behavior with us may be the reason they are part of so many *mo‘olelo*. Grazing animals destroy native forests, cats, rats and mongooses prey on them, and new diseases like avian pox are spread by introduced birds. Once they may have lived at all elevations on Kaua‘i in wooded areas. Today Kaua‘i ‘*elepaio* are only found above 2,000 feet. They are considered vulnerable.