



Photo: Jim Denny

Migratory Birds

'Akekeke or Ruddy Turnstone

Arenaria interpres

SPECIES STATUS:

State recognized as Indigenous
U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan – High Concern

SPECIES INFORMATION: The 'akekeke, or ruddy turnstone, is a small, calico-colored shorebird (Family: Scolopacidae) that is one of the most northerly breeding shorebirds. Each year 'akekeke migrate from tropical coastlines to the Arctic Circle, where they breed in coastal areas and island interiors. 'Akekeke have short bills, bright reddish-orange legs. They spend their days probing among rocks and pebbles along the shoreline in search of insects, especially flies, spiders, beetles, and grubs. Outside of the breeding season, however, their diet becomes much more diversified, extending to crustaceans, mollusks, worms, small fish, and even carrion, rubbish, and bird eggs.

DISTRIBUTION: During breeding season, 'akekeke range from the eastern coast of Greenland to the north-eastern coast of Siberia, with most of the North American population concentrated on the northern coast of Alaska and the Arctic islands north of Canada. In winter, 'akekeke range across a wide swath of tropical coastal regions from southeastern Asia to southwestern Africa and southern Europe. In Hawai'i, 'akekeke are more prevalent on shorelines of the NWHI than in the MHI.

ABUNDANCE: Global population has been estimated at approximately 445,000 individuals, of which about 60percent (267,000) breed in North America. Trend analysis from 1972 to 1983 suggested that the U.S. Atlantic Coast population was in decline, but high variability of counts both within and between years increased uncertainty about the statistical validity of this trend. Average winter population in the MHI from 1986 to 2004, based on State waterbird surveys, was 512 ± 101 (SE), while during breeding season counts averaged 458 ± 62 (SE). Abundance in the NWHI has not been estimated but is probably larger than the MHI population.

LOCATION AND CONDITION OF KEY HABITAT: In winter, 'akekeke are almost exclusively coastal, foraging mostly along stony or rocky shorelines with abundant seaweed. However, especially in Hawai'i and other Pacific Islands, 'akekeke are also common on sandy shorelines and in mudflats and river deltas. Preferred habitats include ocean beaches along sheltered coastlines or bordering estuaries and other wetlands.

THREATS: Across most of their winter range, primary threats to 'akekeke are human industrial and recreational activity leading to habitat loss and degradation by means of chemical contamination and disturbance. Avian diseases are also a threat.

CONSERVATION ACTIONS: To protect the ability of wintering ‘akekeke to survive while in Hawai‘i and to return in good condition to breeding grounds in North America, statewide and island-specific conservation actions should include:

- Protection of coastal habitat.
- Protection and restoration of additional coastal habitat, especially where it can be reclaimed from abandoned urban or agricultural uses.
- Continue protection and management of wildlife sanctuaries and refuges.

MONITORING: Continue surveys of population and distribution in known and likely habitats.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES: Little study of visiting ‘akekeke has been undertaken, probably in part because their annual presence and numbers are uncertain. Research priorities should include the following:

- Identification of stopover sites, their biological attributes, and long-term usage patterns.
- Better understanding of ecological requirements for successful over-wintering, along with growth and development of wintering birds, for all age groups.
- Better understanding of time and energy budgets in relation to molt and preparation for spring migration.
- Measurement of growth and postfledging-survival rates for first arrivals at wintering location.
- More information on known and suspected threats, including degradation of coastal ecosystems, direct interactions with humans, habitat disturbance and destruction, and toxic and chemical contamination.

References:

Nettleship DN. 2000. Ruddy turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 537 (Poole A, Gill F, editors). Philadelphia, (PA): The Academy of Natural Sciences; and Washington DC: The American Ornithologists' Union.