



Captive Propagation and Release of Hawaiian Moorhen, 1953 -1969

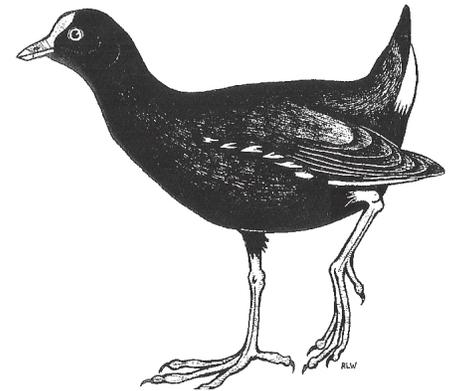
By Arleone Dibben-Young^A

The Hawaiian Moorhen, or 'alae 'ula, is revered in Hawaiian mythology as the keeper of fire. In revenge for the mischievous conduct of the bird while guarding its secret, demigod Māui-mua "rubbed the top of the 'alae's head till it was red with blood, and the red spot remains there to this day" (Thrum, Forbes 1879). The 'alae 'ula is also portrayed as being benevolent: having stolen fire from the gods, the bird then gave the gift to the Hawaiian people. On the flight back to earth a burning stick was held in its bill and the white shield was scorched red by the flames (Munro 1944).

The Hawaiian Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus sandvicensis*), whose name was changed from Hawaiian Gallinule in 2002 (Pyle), was reported as having been common on most of the larger islands by Munro (1944) when he collected bird specimens with H.C. Palmer for L.W. Rothschild, 1890 to 1892. The species would vanish from the island of Hawai'i in 1898, and Maui in 1900 (Walker et al. 1984). Henshaw (1903) noted that the species was "becoming scarcer and scarcer, being slaughtered ... usually shot and thrown away ... quite exterminated in many localities." The Hawaiian Moorhen appeared on the game-bird list with migratory species until the hunting season was closed 1 December 1941¹ (Star Bulletin 1941). Schwartz and Schwartz (1949) surveyed the major Hawaiian Islands from February 1946 through July 1947, and stated "the status of the Hawaiian Gallinule is precarious, especially on O'ahu, Maui, and Moloka'i." A few years later, job completion reports for the Territory-wide annual waterfowl counts revealed the seriousness of the moorhen population decline: 1955 - three on Moloka'i (5-R-6), 1956 - two at Hanalei, Kaua'i (5-R-7), 1957 - none observed (5-R-8), although Curl (1958) reported "nine seen near Hā'ena, Kaua'i in May, and in December, Hanson (1958) observed an unknown number of moorhen in Hālawa Valley, Moloka'i. Territorial survey results for 1959 (5-R-9), and 1960 (W-5-R-10), were comparable. An effort was made from the mid-1950s through 1969, to increase the population with Hawaiian Moorhens raised at the Honolulu Zoo. Releases of these birds occurred at Kanahā Pond on Maui, Waipi'o Valley on Hawai'i, on Moloka'i at Kaluaapuhi Pond, Kakahā'a Pond, and 'Ipukai'ole Pond, and at Ka'elepulu Pond² on O'ahu (Breese pers. comm.), although no data was found for the O'ahu releases.

The Honolulu Zoo received two Hawaiian Moorhens as a donation from 16-year-old Raybern Freitas of Pearl City, O'ahu, 12 November 1953 (Red Line Reports). The young birds,

Hawaiian Moorhen are endemic and endangered; they frequent freshwater ponds and marshes, feeding on mollusks, water plants, and grasses. The frontal shield and bill of the 'alae 'ula are red; the bill has a yellow tip. Drawing by Ron Walker.



siblings, had been collected as day-old chicks at the spring of Waiiau Stream, Pearl Harbor³, and were raised⁴ by Freitas until eight months of age (Freitas pers. comm., Honolulu Advertiser 1953). Edmund Capellast donated a male from Ka'a'awa, O'ahu, 27 February 1954, which was placed in the marsh bird cage with the two siblings. Chicks hatched on 20 June 1954, and over the next two years offspring were shipped twice to the San Antonio Zoo, and once to the San Diego Zoo (Red Line Reports).

In May 1956, all three birds were banded and the sibling male removed, and on 29 June 1956, chicks hatched from the unrelated pair. Two more clutches hatched over the next two months and arrangements were made for the young birds to be released into the wild. The captive-raised birds were marked prior to leaving the zoo with Territory of Hawai'i, Division of Fish and Game metal bands (Medeiros, Cambra, Woodside, pers. comms.). Bands⁵ were imprinted T.H. FISH AND GAME DIV followed by a "C" (signifying "captive-raised") and four digits. The same series was used at the Pōhakuloa Captive Propagation Facility for the Hawaiian Duck (*Anas wyvilliana*) or koloa (Lee pers. comm., Swedberg 1967).

Kanahā Pond, Maui

The Freitas male and five of the juveniles from the unrelated pair were shipped to Kahului, Maui, on 11 September 1956, to Joseph Medeiros, Division of Fish and Game, for release at Kanahā Pond⁶. At least four releases were made at Kanahā Pond (Medeiros pers. comm.): six birds on 11 September 1956, seven on 30 January 1957, two on 19 November 1957 (Red Line

continued on page 18

continued from page 17

Reports), and an unknown number of birds in 1959 (Breese 1980).

The moorhens were held in a temporary enclosure constructed by Louis Cambra on the 'backside' of the sanctuary, placed along the waterline half in the water and half on dry land. A gate on the wetland side was opened for their release roughly two weeks later (Cambra pers. comm.). Cambra worked four days a week at Kanahā Pond trapping predators, and observed "about a dozen or so" of the released moorhens on a regular basis, sometimes daily, and noted that they seemed to prefer the 'front' or south side of the sanctuary along the busy Hana Highway rather than the more remote 'backside' to the north. Cambra left the division in 1968, and Edwin Andrade filled the vacated position, specifically to monitor nēnē (Hawaiian Goose, *Branta sandvicensis*) releases at Haleakalā National Park. Afterwards, Kanahā Pond - unfenced and with no predator control - was visited only sporadically. The moorhens quickly disappeared. Feral dogs were recognized as being problematic and were attributed to the disappearance of the species from the site (Andrade pers. comm.).

Waipi'o Valley, Hawai'i Island

Five moorhens departed the Honolulu Zoo 7 April 1959 (Red Line Reports), and were shipped to David Woodside, Division of Fish and Game in Hilo, for release in Waipi'o Valley. The release site was arranged by Takashi Matsunami, in the 'swamp' in back of his father's house on Waiola Stream (Matsunami⁸ pers. comm.). Only one release was carried out (Woodside pers. comm.). Woodside reported "the four 'alae 'ula were extremely alert and wary" when released. About a year later he observed only one or two 'alae 'ula, and speculated "that taro farmers or others residing in or visiting Waipi'o had killed them for food" (Breese 1980). Masaru Matsunami was interviewed on 22 September 1966 and reported that "some survived four or five years but did not nest successfully" (Banko 1987).

Moloka'i

Four releases were made on Moloka'i⁹ by Division of Fish and Game Warden Noah Pekelo, Jr., at a total of three sites: Kaluaapuhi Pond west of Kaunakakai, Kakahai'a Pond five

Raybern Freitas with Hawaiian Moorhens, 12 November 1953. Photo courtesy of Honolulu Advertiser. Photo restoration by John Haldane.



miles east of town, and at 'Īpukai'ole Pond on Kainalu Ranch on the East End (Manga, Duvauchelle pers. comms.).

By 1960, the breeding pair of Hawaiian Moorhens was referred to as 'the old gallinules'. Two of their offspring, now breeding, were prepared for a loan to the Territorial Board of Agriculture on 18 November 1960. It is easily surmised that these two birds were shipped to Moloka'i, as shortly thereafter two moorhens were noted during the January 1961 annual waterfowl count (W-5-R-12). The numbers of birds involved in the other releases can be deduced by the Red Line Reports and annual waterfowl count results: six moorhens released in 1961 (eight observed January 1962, W-5-R-13), and 11 released in 1962 (Nineteen observed January 1963, W-5-R-14). Moloka'i moorhens totaled 17 in January 1964, and Pekelo (1964) reported that "gallinule [were] common, but localized in brackish fishponds at 'Ō'ō'ia, Kaluaapuhi and Honomuni ponds" although he didn't mention if the moorhens were the released birds.

After remaining reproductively active for over ten years, the first of the 'old gallinules' died in 1964. Breese left the Honolulu Zoo in 1965, to become Wildlife Branch Chief for Hawai'i Fish and Game, and Jack Throp filled the position. By January 1967, only three moorhens were observed on Moloka'i, reflecting not only a lull in the release program, but poaching¹⁰ (Akutagawa pers. comm.). That spring, Throp and Medeiros collected three eggs from a nest in shallow water at Kanahā Pond (Throp pers. comm.), which were then incubated and hatched at the Honolulu Zoo. One of these birds was paired with a moorhen donated by Al Figueira on 9 July 1967, and the release project was revived.

Mid-1969, Pekelo made the last release of Hawaiian Moorhens raised at the Honolulu Zoo with twelve birds. All were accounted for during the annual waterfowl count on 9 August

continued on page 19

'Elepaio

ISSN 0013-6069

Managing Editor: Lydi Morgan

Scientific Editor: Ron Walker

The 'Elepaio is printed on recycled paper and published nine times per year: February, March, April, May, June/July, August/September, October, November, and December/January

850 Richards Street, Suite 505

Honolulu, HI 96813

Phone/Fax: (808) 528-1432

E-mail: hiaudsoc@pixi.com Website: www.hawaiiadubon.com

Pacific Fisheries Coalition (PFC) (a project of HAS)

Tel: (808) 262-6859 Website: www.pacfish.org

Board Roster:

John Harrison President

Wendy Johnson, First Vice President

Ron Walker, Second Vice President

Liz Kumabe, Recording Secretary

Carol Bebb, Director

Carolyn Blackburn, Director

Phil Bruner, Director

Arlene Buchholz, Director

Tom Jacobs, Director

Staff:

Casey Primacio, Office Manager

Linda Paul, Executive Director for Aquatics

Committee Chairs:

Conservation: John Harrison

Education: Wendy Johnson & Liz Kumabe

Elepaio: Ron Walker

Field Trips: Casey Primacio

Fundraising: Carolyn Blackburn & Tom Jacobs

Grants & Scholarships: Phil Bruner

Membership: Carolyn Blackburn

Program: Arlene Buchholz

Publications: Linda Paul & Wendy Johnson

Website: Stephen Bibbs

1969, however, observations soon declined. On 3 September 1969, Pekelo spotted nine at Kaluaapuhi Pond (Pekelo 1970), Walker noted moorhens at Kapa'akea Pond west of Kaunakakai in 1971 (Walker pers. comm.), and Pekelo communicated to Shallenberger (1977) that his last observation of the Hawaiian Moorhen on Moloka'i was in 1973.

Acknowledgements

This account of the only known captive-raised and released Hawaiian Moorhens would not have been possible without the assistance of Edwin Andrade, Paul Breese, Louis Cambra, James Duvauchelle (Moloka'i Ranch), Raybern Freitas, Michele Harman (Hawai'i Biodiversity Mapping Program), Leslie Kawamoto (Honolulu Advertiser), John Haldane (photo restoration), Carla Kishinami (Bernice P. Bishop Museum), Ah Fat Lee, Peter Luscomb (Honolulu Zoo), Takashi Matsunami, Michael Munga (Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement), Joseph Medeiros, Jack Throp, Ronald Walker and David Woodside. Mahalo nui loa!

^P.O. Box 580, Kaunakakai, HI 96748,
researchbirds@yahoo.com

Notations

1. Regulation 4 Shorebirds. Section 1. It shall be unlawful to take, kill, destroy, or have in possession, any migratory wild duck, plover, snipe, turnstone, curlew, stilt, mudhen.
2. It is probable that releases were made in 1958, at either Ka'elepulu Pond or Kanahā Pond, however, breeding records for that year were sparse and no release records were found, nor did those interviewed recall specific releases during 1958. As Medeiros was writing his report, *The present status of migratory waterfowl in Hawai'i* (1958. *Journal of Wildlife Management*. 22(2): 109 - 117.), it is more likely that moorhens would have been released at Ka'elepulu Pond by John R. Woodworth, Territory of Hawai'i Fish and Game.
3. Raymond C. R. Freitas, father of Raybern Freitas, was the steam and electrical engineer at the Waiiau Power Plant located at Pearl Harbor, O'ahu. The Freitas family lived in on-site

employee housing, near the Waiiau Stream spring, which was located just east of the facility. Several years later the houses were demolished, the spring and stream filled, and the area paved for a parking lot.

4. Freitas raised the chicks on a diet of water chestnuts, taro, watercress, and live mosquito fish, all gathered daily at Waiiau Stream. The birds bonded to Freitas and became demanding of his time. Too noisy to keep as pets, the birds were donated to the Honolulu Zoo.

5. Band Example: Bernice P. Bishop Museum specimen Hawaiian Moorhen (complete skeleton) BBM-X 147201, banded T.H. Fish and Garue Div C1692, died 31 December 1973, at the Honolulu Zoo.

6. The Territorial Board of Agriculture designated Kanahā Pond as a waterfowl sanctuary December 1949 (Maui News. 31 December 1949. Kanahā Pond designated waterfowl sanctuary by Territorial Board of Agriculture and Forestry. p. 2:4).

7. Masaru Matsunami, landowner of the release site, reported "about six" birds were introduced (Banko 1987). Twenty years after the Waipi'o Valley releases Woodside reported that four birds were involved (Breese 1980).

8. Takashi Matsunami's life-long friend was Michio Takata, Director of Hawai'i Fish and Game 1959-1977.

9. The records of the Moloka'i releases were housed in the Division of Conservation and Resource Enforcement office at the State's Multi-Purpose Center in Kaunakakai. The building was destroyed by arson 10 February 1980 (Manga pers. comm., Maui News. 11 February 1980. State facility destroyed. Honolulu Advertiser. 11 February 1980. Fire levels state office building on Moloka'i; records destroyed. Maui News. 13 February 1980. Moloka'i fire was arson.).

10. As a teenager, William Akutagawa observed that poaching of moorhen was common, because "the bird was different and had a red beak." Pekelo caught Akutagawa twice poaching deer, and instructed him to attend Pekelo's hunter education classes. Akutagawa "learned his lesson" and has now taught hunter education on Moloka'i for over twenty-five years (Akutagawa pers. comm.).

continued on page 20

HAS Undergraduate Tuition Scholarship Available for the 2009-2010 School Year Applications Due May 1, 2009

Through a trust set up by Yao Shen in memory of Rose Schuster Taylor, the Hawaii Audubon Society annually awards a full tuition scholarship to an undergraduate student in the University of Hawai'i system. Applicants must be majoring in a field related to Hawaiian or Pacific natural history. Applications for the 2009-2010 school year are due on May 1, 2009. Application guidelines are available at www.hawaii.audubon.com under "chapter news" or by contacting the HAS office at (808) 528-1432 or hiaudsoc@pixi.com.

Plastic and Hawaii's Marine Life: Lecture/Film Series

This series of free, public events in April 2009 is being presented by the Beach Environmental Awareness Campaign Hawai'i and the UH Mānoa (UHM) Department of Educational Foundations. The weekly series will cover topics such as marine life in the main and Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and the impacts of plastic on our health, marine life and the environment. The events will take place every Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. All events will take place at the UHM Architecture Auditorium except one - the lecture on Wed. April 8th will take place in the UHM Art Auditorium. Visit www.iyor-hawaii.org or www.malamahawaii.org/calendar for details.

Literature Cited

- Banko, W.E. 1987. History of endemic Hawaiian birds. Freshwater birds: Hawaiian Gallinule 'Alae 'Ula. CPSU/UH Avian history report 12A. National Park Service Contract CX-8000-8-0012. University of Hawai'i, Honolulu, Hawai'i.
- Breese, P.L. 1980. Feasibility study and recommendations for the establishment and management of a wildlife sanctuary at Pololū Valley, Island of Hawai'i. Hawai'i Division of Forestry and Wildlife. Job completion report W-18-R-4, R-III-E. Honolulu, Hawai'i.
- Curl, A.L. 1958. Birding on the outlying islands. 'Elepaio. 18(4): 43 - 44. Hanson, C. 1958. Moloka'i notes. 'Elepaio. 18(10): 68
- Hawai'i Division of Fish and Game. Annual waterfowl count. Job completion reports. 1955. 5-R-6. 1956. 5-R-7. 1957. 5-R-8. 1958. 5-R-9. 1959. W-5-R-10. Honolulu, Territory of Hawai'i. Hawai'i Division of Fish and Game. Annual waterfowl count. Job completion reports. 1960. W-5-R-11. 1961. W-5-R-12. 1962. W-5-R-13. 1963. W-5-R-14. 1964. W-5-R-15. 1967. W-5-R-18. Honolulu, Hawai'i.
- Henshaw, H.W. 1902. Birds of the Hawaiian Islands being a complete list of the birds of the Hawaiian possession with notes on their habits. T.G. Thrum, Honolulu, Hawai'i Territory.
- Henshaw, H.W. 1903. Occurrence of the Emperor Goose in Hawai'i. Auk 20 (2): 164 - 167. Honolulu Advertiser. 15 November 1953. Reared by youth two unusual birds given to city zoo. p. A14:5. Munro, G.C. 1944. Birds of Hawai'i. Tongg Publishing Company, Honolulu, Hawai'i.
- Pekelo, N., Jr. 1964. Nature notes from Moloka'i. 'Elepaio. 24(10):46 - 48.
- Pekelo, N., Jr. 1970. Field notes from Moloka'i. 'Elepaio. 30(7):65.
- Pyle, R.L. 2002. Checklist of the birds of Hawai'i. 'Elepaio. 62(6): 137 - 148. Red Line Reports. 1948 - 1970. Honolulu Zoo, Honolulu, Hawai'i.
- Schwartz, C.R., and E.R. Schwartz. 1949. The garue birds in Hawai'i. Board of Agriculture and Forestry, Territory of Hawai'i.
- Shallenberger, R.J. 1977. An ornithological survey of Hawaiian wetlands. U.S. Army Engineer District Contract DACW 84-77-C-036. A Hui Manu Productions, Honolulu, Hawai'i.
- Star Bulletin. 1 December 1941. Rules and regulations of Division of Forestry, Fish and Game. pp. 18 - 19.
- Swedberg, G.E. 1967. The Koloa: A preliminary report on the life history and status of the Hawaiian Duck (*Anas wyvilliana*). Hawai'i Division of Fish & Game. Honolulu, Hawai'i.
- Thrum, T.G. and A.O. Forbes. 1879. Hawaiian tradition of the origin of fire. The Hawaiian Annual and Almanac. T.G. Thrum, Honolulu, Hawaiian Islands. pp. 59 - 60.
- Walker, R.L., J.M. Brown, G.R. Gravatt, S.R. Rose, and R.F. Villeda. 1984. Endangered species information system. Hawaiian Gallinule. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C.

HAS Field Trips

Contact the HAS Office at:
(808) 528-1432, hiaudsoc@pixi.com

Saturday, April 11, 9:00 a.m.

"Farewell to Shorebirds" low tide walk at Paikō Lagoon with Alice Roberts

There's always a lot to see at Paikō! This is a great place for kids and adults to explore and reconnect to our natural environment. Contact Alice at (808) 864-8122 to sign up.

Saturday, May 23, 7:30 a.m.

"Summer Low tide Walk" at Paikō Lagoon with Alice Roberts

Please contact Alice at (808) 864-8122 to sign up.

Saturday, June 20, 10:00 a.m.

Hilton Hawaiian Village Bird Tour with Alice Roberts

Come explore the Hilton's beautiful grounds and ponds where we will discover a variety of fish and water birds. Parking is not validated unless you eat lunch at a restaurant at the Hilton. Space is limited, call Alice to register, (808) 864-8122.

*Full Moon
Seabird Adventures
Thursday, April 9 @ Friday, May 8
5:30 - 8:30 p.m.*

Please join the Hawaii Audubon Society for an evening sail off the beautiful south shore of O'ahu to view Hawaii's pelagic seabirds in action. We plan to sail to waters off Black Point, O'ahu for a thrilling opportunity to see large numbers of wedge-tailed shearwaters return from foraging at sea to their breeding colony at the Society's Freeman Seabird Preserve. Boobies, noddies, white terns, great frigatebirds, and pomarine jaegers may also be observed in graceful flight over the gleaming ocean.

We will be sailing with Captain Gaelyn Penberthy on a 40-foot catamaran departing from Kewalo Basin. A box lunch will be provided and participants should plan for rough water.

Price is \$100 per person with net proceeds dedicated to support habitat restoration at the Freeman Seabird Preserve and tax deductible. Space is limited to 30 people. Please contact Hawaii Audubon Society at (808) 528-1432 or hiaudsoc@pixi.com to make reservations.

Laysan Albatross and Plastics

How Our Habits Are Affecting the Planet

Excerpts reprinted with permission from the Monterey Bay Aquarium

In the middle of the North Pacific Ocean, on a tiny island 1,000 miles from the nearest big city, human impact is having a heavy cost. Of 500,000 albatross chicks born each year on Midway Atoll, about 200,000, or 40%, die of starvation, their bellies full of bottle caps, toothbrushes and other plastic. The awful truth—in their searches of the ocean surface, albatrosses mistake plastic trash for food and end up feeding Lego blocks, clothespins, plastic bag bits and a host of other man-made junk to their chicks. As a result, the large amount of plastic crowding the chick's stomach leaves little room for food and liquid.

Many people think that the biggest source of pollution in the oceans is oil spilled from ships, but most marine pollution is litter that starts out on land. Trash that's dropped on the ground doesn't stay put. Even hundreds of miles from the ocean, trash is washed by rain into city storm drains and out into streams and rivers that lead to the ocean. From there, wind and currents carry our trash far out to sea.

The amount of plastic floating in our oceans has grown dramatically over the last fifty years. Anthony L. Andrady, a polymer chemist at the Research Triangle Institute in North Carolina says that plastic takes decades to break down on land, but even longer at sea because the water keeps the plastic cool and algae blocks ultraviolet rays. "Every little piece of plastic manufactured in the past 50 years that made it into the ocean is still out there somewhere."

Scientists estimate that around the world, **up to one million seabirds and 100,000 marine mammals and sea turtles die each year from eating plastic.** It's time to take a serious look at our habits and create changes *now* that will begin to heal our planet.

How You Can Help

REDUCE your use of plastics and Styrofoam:

Don't buy plastic water bottles. Use reusable bottles (glass or stainless steel are best) and drink tap water!

Always bring your own reusable shopping bags for groceries and other items.

Purchase and use a washable coffee mug every time you visit the coffee shop.

Bring your own reusable container for leftovers to restaurants and take out spots.

Bring your own utensils, chopsticks, plates, cups, etc. to picnics, parties, and potlucks!

Look for products made from recycled materials that have little or no packaging, or packaging that is recyclable.

Always recycle #1 and #2 plastics (look for the number in the triangle).

Avoid non-recyclable plastics (all other numbers), and otherwise be sure that they are securely disposed of. Pick up two pieces of trash every day.

Make it a habit! REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE and restore! Make Earth Day every day.

Special Program Meeting, April 22, 7:00 p.m.

“Kōlea Research: 30 Years and Counting”

Hawaii Audubon Society and the Sierra Club O'ahu Group are joining forces to bring news of the latest in Kōlea (Pacific Golden Plover) research to your part of the world. On Wednesday evening, April 22, Dr. Wally Johnson and his wife Pat will present “Kōlea Research: 30 Years and Counting” at Windward Community College

The Johnsons will continue their kōlea research in Hawai'i this “kōlea season” using a new technology – data loggers. The data loggers are tiny gadgets that can be attached to a leg band on the kōlea. The loggers can record sunrise/sunset times daily for up to two years, from which one can calculate latitude and longitude of where the bird has been. This will mean that kōlea will have to be recaptured so that the logger can be recovered and data downloaded into a computer. This new research

effort should prove to be very exciting and provide better understanding of migratory routes, wintering ground locations, and where our Hawai'i kōlea go when they leave for the summer breeding grounds.

The two large meeting rooms at Hale Ākoakoa on the Windward Community College campus have been reserved for the usual overflow crowd at any of Dr. Johnson's lectures. The address is 45-720 Kea'ahala Road. Follow the Hale Ākoakoa signs to the parking lot at the top of the campus. Plan on being there early. The lecture will start at 7:00 p.m. Hawaii Audubon Society will have kōlea t-shirts and books and other items for sale. You can even see and hear kōlea squabbling on the roofs of the State Hospital buildings as you leave the lecture.

MUDHENS?

By Ron Walker

Reprinted with permission from the newsletter of Ahahui Malama i ka Lokahi

Many observers of wetland birds often refer to coots and gallinules as “mud hens” or “swamp hens” because of their association with mucky marshes. In Hawai‘i, the bird previously called the common gallinule is now officially known as the “common moorhen”. This subspecies or race of a bird of worldwide distribution has many names here: ‘alae, ‘alae ‘ula, ‘alae huapi, or koki. Its scientific name is *Gallinula chloropus sandvicensis*, and it is a member of the rail family (Rallidae). The expression “thin as a rail” refers to a bird, not railroad rails!

Hawaiian tradition has two stories which account for the red color of its bill. One says that the ‘alae took pity on the people who lacked fire by flying to the home of the gods, stealing a blazing fire brand and carrying it back to earth. In the process it burned its white bill, turning it red. Another tale says that Maui

and his brothers tricked the ‘alae that previously held the secret of fire into revealing the process. In his anger at being deprived for so long, Maui touched the head of the leading bird with a fire stick, turning it red.

‘Alae ‘ula feed on freshwater plants including grasses, shoots, roots, algae, seeds and taro tops; the animal diet includes worms, snails, grasshoppers, fish and aquatic insects. They nest all months of the year but mostly from March through August. Nests are usually built on solid ground near water or suspended in clumps of vegetation, often with a “gangplank” of reeds to facilitate entry and exit. From 6 to 15 buff, spotted eggs are laid and incubated for about 3 weeks before the precocial chicks hatch. The babies are little black “fuzzballs” and have a spur at the bend of the wing to facilitate climbing in thick vegetation.

Birdbrains

Island pigeons find their way home

By Adrienne LaFrance

This article was published in the February 4-10, 2009 edition of the Honolulu Weekly and is reprinted here with permission from the Honolulu Weekly

These days, on par with their wingless urban counterparts, pigeons get as little respect as rats. We mock their mechanical head-bobbing strut, we shoo them away from café tables and we rarely pause to comment on their beauty as we might for even a mynah or java sparrow. But the birds—and the rats, though that’s another story—deserve more credit.

Pigeons have a long and revered history in society. Centuries upon centuries ago, kings from Egypt to Rome to India and beyond used them to deliver messages over great distances. The U.S. government honored them for message-carrying service to the Allied forces during World War I. Pigeons even had a role in the development of modern journalism; global news service Reuters started out as a pigeon carrier network in the 19th century.

Pigeon appreciation is still alive and well, in Honolulu and elsewhere, and it goes beyond tossing a couple of bread crusts their way now and again. In fact, there is a global network of pigeon enthusiasts that breed, feed and race the birds.

Rather remarkably, races in the Islands involve flying pigeons to other islands in the cargo load of local flights, arranging for someone to release the birds at a certain point, then waiting for them to find their way back home.

“They are homing pigeons, which means they always go home,” said Stratford Whiting, pigeon breeder and president of the Aloha Pigeon Club. “All the birds fly to their individual lofts and when they go through a little trap door, they set off an alarm and a clock. The clock reads a computer chip on their leg, which identifies the bird and records the exact time that the bird

comes home. So you divide the distance by the time and you get miles per hour, yards per minute. The fastest speed wins the race.”

And pigeons are no slowpokes. Whiting says they can fly as fast as 100 miles per hour, but usually cruise at a comfortable 50–60 mph. Just how they navigate with such accuracy remains somewhat of a mystery.

“Everybody has their theories and the fact of the matter is, nobody knows,” said Whiting. “There have been more PhDs who have taken it upon themselves but they all failed miserably. Some think they may have an electromagnetic sense, the way whales and salmon do. There are also these little organs behind the eyes that nobody’s sure what they’re for, so that could be it too.”

Like most people who compete in the sport, 75-year-old Whiting started racing pigeons as a child. During his college years at UCLA, he kept his pigeons in a loft behind his fraternity house. Today, Whiting, a retired civil engineer, keeps about 100 pigeons in lofts near his Diamond Head house. The sport is one that people, at least locally, participate in for tradition rather than money. The \$25 prize for a win at the local three-club combine is far surpassed by the cost of participating in the sport.

“It’s \$3,000 or \$4,000 per bird,” Whiting said. “They can live to be up to 10 years but usually four or five years is as long as they would race. After that they start developing bad habits, like finding reservoirs and stopping for a drink.”

Earth Day 2009

Learn more about how you can help our planet and the many organizations that are working to heal the earth at these exciting Earth Day events, taking place throughout the month of April.

Moloka'i Earth Day

Friday, April 12, 5:00 – 9:00 p.m.
Mitchell Pauole Center in Kaunakakai
(808) 553-5236

Kaua'i Earth Day

Saturday, April 18, 7:30 a.m. to Noon
Lydgate Park
(808) 245-5959, www.kamalani.org

Maui Earth Day Festival

Sunday, April 19, 10:00 a.m. to Sunset
Baldwin Beach Park, Paia
www.mauiearthday.org

University of Hawai'i Earth Day

Wednesday, April 22
11:00 – 6:00 Open-air Marketplace, 6:00 – 9:00 p.m. Concert
UH Mānoa, O'ahu
(808) 772-1874, <http://sustainablesaunders.hawaii.edu>

The Green Market Celebration, Downtown Honolulu
Wednesday, April 22, 10:30 – 1:30, Fort Street Mall
Hosted by Honolulu Weekly, Whole Foods, and Blue Planet Foundation
(808) 528-1475 x 17

Grow Hawaiian Festival

Saturday, April 25, 9:00 – 3:00, Bishop Museum
A celebration of native and Polynesian-introduced plants.
Free for kama'aina and military.

Kona Earth Festival

Saturday, April 25: Earth and Ocean Fair, 9:45 – 3:00, Outrigger Keauhou Resort
April 10 – May 6: Month of Events
(808) 854-0171, www.konaearthfestival.org

This is just a sampling of the many wonderful events that are planned in celebration of Earth Day 2009. But don't forget – EVERY DAY IS EARTH DAY! Let's all commit to simple living, reducing waste, eating local and organic foods, caring for our precious native ecosystems, inspiring youth, and taking time to reconnect to the natural world and giving thanks for all that we have. Mālama pono.

Membership in Hawaii Audubon Society 2009

Regular Member:	\$ 25.00	Foreign Membership (Airmail)	
Student Member:.....	\$ 15.00	Mexico.....	\$ 26.00
Supporting Member:.....	\$100.00	Canada.....	\$ 28.00
Family Membership.....	\$40.00	All other countries	\$ 33.00

*These are annual membership dues, valid January 1 through December 31.
Donations are tax deductible and gratefully accepted.*

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Country, Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Membership \$ _____ + Donation \$ _____ = Total \$ _____

New Membership Renewal

Please make checks payable to Hawaii Audubon Society and mail to us at 850 Richards St., #505, Honolulu, HI 96813.

PLEASE LET US KNOW IF YOUR ADDRESS CHANGES.



HAWAII AUDUBON SOCIETY
850 RICHARDS STREET, SUITE 505
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813-4709

www.hawaii-audubon.com
Phone/Fax: (808) 528-1432
hiaudsoc@pixi.com

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Honolulu, Hawaii
Permit Number 1156

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

'ELEPAIO • 69:3 • APRIL 2009

Calendar of Events

Month of April

Lecture/Film Series:

Plastic and Hawaii's Marine Life *See page 19*

Month of April

EARTH DAY EVENTS *See page 23*

Saturday, April 11

HAS Field Trip: Paikō Lagoon *See page 20*

Wednesday, April 22

Special Program Meeting

Kōlea Research: 30 Years and Counting *See page 21*

Friday, May 1

HAS Scholarship Applications Due *See page 19*

Friday, May 8

Full Moon Seabird Adventures *See page 20*

Table of Contents

Captive Propagation and Release of Hawaiian Moorhen, 1953-1969	17
HAS Undergraduate Tuition Scholarship	19
Plastic and Hawaii's Marine Life: Lecture/Film Series	19
HAS Field Trips	20
Full Moon Seabird Adventures.....	20
Laysan Albatross and Plastics. How Our Habitats Are Affecting the Planet	21
Special Program Meeting.....	21
MUDHENS?	22
Birdbrains. Island pigeons find their way home.....	22
Earth Day 2009	23
Membership Application.....	23