



# 'ELEPAIO

Journal of the  
Hawaii Audubon Society

For the Protection of  
Hawaii's Native Wildlife

VOLUME 71, NUMBER 8

DECEMBER 2011

## Kioea, Bristle-thighed Curlew, Declared Official Bird of Kaunakakai, Moloka'i

Arleone Dibben-Young

In 2005, a Moloka'i resident asked about an unusual looking brown bird with a long down-curved bill that frequented second base outfield at Duke Maliu Regional Park, Kaunakakai. The Bristle-thighed Curlew or kioea, as the mystery bird turned out to be, was known to have foraged in the alfalfa fields at that location as early as the 1930s and when planted in corn in the 1970s. The curlews continued to forage at the site when a ball park was built in 1987 and following the construction of the multi-purpose sports field in 1999 (Helm pers. comm.). In 2010, I wrote a short article about this extraordinary bird for the two local newspapers and received numerous phone calls that it could also be found elsewhere on the island, and that 'ōlelo o kupuna – the stories of ancestors – reference the kioea (also spelled kiowa) of Moloka'i. Having sparked a new interest in the species and inspired by Keith Swindle's successful efforts to have the manu-o-ku (White or Fairy Tern, *Gygis alba*) named as the Official Bird of Honolulu in 2007, in spring 2011, I circulated a petition for Kaunakakai's curlews to receive the same distinction. Over 1,000 signatures were obtained, and on 25 October 2011, Maui Mayor Alan Arakawa and Council Chair Danny Mateo signed the Proclamation declaring the kioea, Bristle-thighed Curlew, *Numenius tahitiensis*, the Official Bird of Kaunakakai, Moloka'i.

### Kioea of Moloka'i

The Bristle-thighed Curlew is one of the rarest and most unique shorebirds in the world. It is recognized by a decurved bill and bristles (bare feather shafts lacking barbs) on its thighs, the function of which is unknown. The species breeds in Alaska and winters exclusively on atolls and islands in the tropical Pacific Ocean where adults spend nine months a year and young birds remain for the first several years of their lives: Fewer than 3,500 breeding pairs are estimated. The Bristle-thighed Curlew is the only shorebird known to become flightless during molt and to use tools when foraging (Marks, Tibbitts, Gill and Mccaffery 2002). On Moloka'i it has been observed tapping Hawaiian Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus knudseni*) eggs with a rock to open and suck the contents. When handed shrimp by employees at a Pala'aui aquaculture farm that had fallen to the ground, the birds would carry the prey to nearby water to wash before swallowing whole (Dibben-Young pers. obs.).



Kioea, Bristle-thighed Curlew

Photo Arleone Diben-Young

Fossil remains indicate that the Bristle-thighed Curlew were found on all of the main Hawaiian Islands, but was most abundant on Moloka'i (Olson and James 1982). Today, the species can be observed August through April in small flocks at several easily accessed locations<sup>1</sup> on the outskirts of the town of Kaunakakai: year-round individuals are common.

Certainly the numbers of curlews on Moloka'i were once substantial as 'ōlelo about the species in the Hawaiian Islands are unique to the island. The earliest historical record of the Bristle-thighed Curlew on Moloka'i refers to its residency at Ka la'i o ke Kioea (Ka 'Elele Hawai'i 1848). Hawaiian language newspapers contain songs and poems with references of Moloka'i's curlews to honor family members, and abound with stories by visitors to the island about the abundance of the species and its peculiar habit of perching and roosting in trees. In his book, *Aves Hawaianae* (Wilson and Evans 1890-1899), Scott B. Wilson describes being taken by Moloka'i resident Rudolph W. Meyer to a marsh [Ka la'i o ke Kioea] near Kaunakakai where he collected several from a flock of a dozen June 1888. Entomologist Robert C.L. Perkins noted that large flocks foraged in coastal mud flats and open uplands, and that a small number of birds over-summered (Perkins 1903). Paleontological collector Annie M. Alexander<sup>2</sup> observed a flock

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of 50-75 flying overhead at sunset near Pala‘au on 2 March 1910, and recorded that a flock of about 20 curlews roosted nightly on the mudflats at ‘Ō‘ōia and became a “noisy clutter” just before taking off after dawn.

Fifteen of 18 Bristle-thighed Curlew specimens identified as having been procured in the main Hawaiian Islands during the ornithological collecting fervor of the 1880s to early 1900s are from Moloka‘i. In 1898 the Übersee-Museum, Bremen, Germany purchased a mount of a two-year-old curlew dated 1888 from the estate of Meyer following his death, most likely obtained by Meyer when accompanying Wilson. The disposition of two of Wilson’s specimens is known, both second year birds collected June 1888<sup>3</sup>; an study skin sold to Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie (NCB Naturalis) Leiden, Netherlands (email van der Mije to Dibben-Young 13 October 2011), and a male acquired by the British Museum of Natural History (BMNH) from his widow Emma A. Wilson 24 January 1925. A third skin at the BMNH was collected by Perkins in 1893 (emails Van Grouw to Dibben-Young 18 and 19 May 2011). Two more of Perkins’ specimens are housed at the University Museum of Zoology Cambridge, UK (UMZC 2011). The American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) contains three specimens: two males obtained by Henry C. Palmer on 11 and 12 February 1893, and one collected by Alexander in 1910 (emails Trombone to Dibben-Young 17 and 27 May 2011).

Alexander collected six Bristle-thighed Curlews during two visits to Moloka‘i. The first, 10 February 1910, was at the request of William A. Bryan of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum (BPBM) for ornithologist Jonathan Dwight V on behalf of the AMNH. Accompanied by her sister Martha M. Waterhouse and cousin Clarence H. Cooke for the four-day hunting excursion headquartered at Moloka‘i Ranch director George P. Cooke’s Kauluwai estate, the group traversed the west end of the island daily by horseback until reaching the Pala‘au region where the curlew was collected on the last day. During the second trip

26 February through 5 March 1910, Alexander camped in a tent pitched courtesy of George C. Munro on the sand spit at ‘Ō‘ōia fishpond and wrote “The day and mudflats mornings and evenings in unmolested freedom. The waders could hardly find a more favored winter resort” (Alexander 1910). Five more specimens were ‘put up’ (preserved) by lantern light: all six remain at the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, Berkeley (MVZ 2011).



Bristle-thighed Curlew specimen collected on Moloka‘i by Rudolph W. Meyer 1888, and mounted by Meyer’s son Theodore who was taught taxidermy by S.B. Wilson

Courtesy Peter-René Becker, Übersee-Museum

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### ‘Elepaio

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### ‘Ōlelo o kioea: sayings and place names

The Bristle-thighed Curlew is woven into the culture on Moloka‘i. When researching Hawaiian place names, proverbs and poetical sayings in 1961, ethnologist Mary Kawena Pukui consulted a number of Moloka‘i residents born in the 1880s. She began one interview by soliciting the saying Moloka‘i, i ka ho‘olale i ka wa‘a - Moloka‘i, where the kioea calls the canoe to go fishing (Pukui 1961). Mary Po‘aha recalled Pa‘akea, ka la‘i o ke kioea - Kapa‘akea, the tranquil spot of the kioea, referring to the name of the marsh and the peacefulness of the birds, whereas her husband James reminisced when it was plentiful and shot in great numbers, “Whistle, you whistle, when you whistle, they circle above you. One bullet and they lay there.” He associated the saying ka la‘i kioea - the calm kioea, with the silence after the entire flock of kioea the marsh had been killed (Pukui 1961). Although protected by the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act since 1918 and Hawai‘i law since 1939, illegal shorebird hunting was common on Moloka‘i through the late 1960s. The subtle change of color in April to breeding plumage with speckles of golden amber was the indication to hunters that the kioea had fattened for migration and it was time to harvest (W. Akutagawa pers. comm.).

Traditional place names referring to the kioea were uncovered during Pukui’s interviews. Dan Pahupu recalled the shoreline area near the Kalama‘ula homesteads called Ho‘olonokioea - listening to the kioea’s call (Pukui 1961). Hīlia (Alexander and Monsarrat 1886) was described by James Po‘aha as being located on the inland side of the long sand beach of a fishpond (Pākanaka Pond) and associated with the saying kioea ‘ai pua ‘i‘i o Hīlia - the kioea that eats the fish spawn of Hīlia (Pukui 1983). The upland district of Ho‘olehua, the fertile saddle between Moloka‘i’s two extinct volcanoes once blanketed in soft kakonakona grass (*Panicum torridum*), figured prominently in local kioea folklore. Ku‘u manu ō o Ho‘olehua was said of the kioea, whose early morning call Lawelawe ke ō! Lawelawe ke ō! Take the food! Take the food! signaled fishermen it was time to go to the sea (Nūpepa Kuokoa 1862, Pukui 1983).

### The kioea as the Official Bird of Kaunakakai

The distinction as the Official Bird of Kaunakakai will play an important role in the future of the Bristle-thighed Curlew on Moloka‘i. The connection to the island’s culture and natural resources will raise its profile and offer more protection at a local level so that future generations of Molokaians will have the chance to create new ‘Ōlelo for this remarkable bird.

### Acknowledgements

I am particularly grateful to Peter-René Becker (Übersee-Museum), Hein Van Grouw (Natural History Museum), Steven van der Mije (NCB Naturalis), and Thomas J. Trombone (American Museum of Natural History) for supplying images of specimens and labels, and Carla Cicero (Museum of Vertebrate



Annie M. Alexander 1908.

Photo courtesy of the University of California Museum of Paleontology.

Zoology) for assistance with the Alexander collection. Mahalo nui loa to William Akutagawa (hunter education instructor and son of a shorebird hunter) for illustrating previous Moloka‘i hunting traditions, Zachary Helm (County of Maui Department of Parks) for noting the presence of the kioea at the park for over 25 years, Frances Makanani Cobb-Adams for translating Hawaiian language newspapers, Peter Pyle for aging specimens, and Keith Swindle for his review of the Proclamation. Mahalo nui loa to the Moloka‘i Public Library staff and the following stores that assisted with the petition: Kālele Books & Devine Expressions, Kamoi Snack ‘N Go, Moloka‘i Drug Store, Moloka‘i Wine ‘n Spirits, and Simon and Friends Pet Shoppe.

1. A map of Kaunakakai kioea observation sites is available at the Moloka‘i Visitor’s Association.
2. Annie M. Alexander, daughter of Hawai‘i sugar magnate Samuel T. Alexander, founded both the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology and Museum of Paleontology at the University of California, Berkeley.
3. The collection date and ages of the Meyer and Wilson curlews indicates over-summering residents.

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- Arleone Dibben-Young, P.O. Box 580, Kaunakakai, Moloka'i, Hawai'i 96748 [researchbirds@yahoo.com](mailto:researchbirds@yahoo.com)

## Freeman Seabird Preserve Service Trips

We will be starting our service trips out to FSP January 7<sup>th</sup> through March. Please come help out by signing up in advance, we do carpool and want to make sure we will have enough tools for everyone that wants to help. If you would like to bring a group out to help with our restoration efforts please email our office at [hiaudsoc@pixi.com](mailto:hiaudsoc@pixi.com)

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Adopt Today!



## **Hawai‘i Audubon Society Annual Meeting**

December 12, 2011  
6-9 pm

First Unitarian Church of Honolulu  
2500 Pali Hwy in the “Art Gallery”

The First Unitarian Church of Honolulu is located on the corner of Niolopa and Pali Hwy.

Go up the Pali toward Kailua, about a mile up from H1 you will go under the Wyllie St. overpass, be in the left lane, at the Jack Lane stop light do a U-TURN and come back to Niolopa, turn right on Niolopa, the second left on Niolopa is the entrance to the parking lot.

Our presentation will be by Ron Walker and Phil Bruner on the Birds of Hawai‘i and how to identify them. This will help out those that are planning to help out with our Christmas Bird Count going on State wide! We will have lite refreshments feel free to bring something to share!

We will also be collecting Board member ballots and introducing our Board of Directors for 2012!  
Look forward to seeing you there!!

## **Field trips**

### **James Campbell National Wildlife Refuge**

**Saturday January 21 at 3:30**  
**Saturday February 4 at 9am**

In 2012 HAS has reserved 2 tour dates for James Campbell National Wildlife Refuge. The dates are **January 21 at 3:30pm** and **February 4 at 9am**.

Tour last about 1 1/2 hour, walking along a grassy loop trail. Participants should wear comfortable walking shoes and bring binoculars.

Driving directions from the north Shore: approximately 2 miles past Turtle Bay hotel, near mile marker 15 and just after the bridge, turn left towards the ocean and turn on to a crushed rock road, park at the JCNWR baseyard. Coming from windward Oahu turn right just past the sugar mill. Additional information and driving directions can be heard by calling 808-637-6330 ext 3.

## **Membership in Hawaii Audubon Society 2012**

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## Porcine Patter

By Ron Walker

Reprinted from "Hawaii's Forests and Wildlife", Newsletter of the State Division of Forestry and Wildlife, Volume VII, No. 4, Winter, 1992.

Feral Pigs figure prominently in current natural resource issues and once again questions are being raised about what to do about them and how to do it.

Hunters are concerned about "control" programs which they fear are precursors to eradication. Animal welfare and animal rights advocates believe that some control measures (including hunting with dogs) are inhumane. Habitat managers are frustrated by the lack of success in reducing over-populations of feral pigs in inaccessible areas. The general public accuses the porkers of causing erosion and sedimentation in the lowlands and complains about pigs in their petunias. Rural folks who depend on their hunters to bring home the bacon perceive that pig populations are diminishing. When you consider that there are an estimated 100,000 wild pigs in Hawaii (probably a conservative estimate) found from 10,000 feet on the highest mountain to sea level in conservation, agricultural, rural and urban environments- with no limiting factors except people and a food supply- the magnitude of the issues should be apparent. To put things into perspective from the standpoint of the State of Hawaii, let's look at the laws and rules which cover these animals.

Under Section 183, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), the Board of Land and Natural Resources (BLNR) is mandated to "Devise ways and means of protecting, extending, increasing, and utilizing the forests and forest reserves...for protecting and developing the springs, streams, and sources of water supply to increase and make that water supply available for use". Preventing feral pigs from abusing or contaminating watersheds is an implied task in accomplishing these goals.

Section 183D, HRS gives broad powers to the BLNR to administer the wildlife resources of the State (feral pigs are included in the definition of "wildlife") including regulating hunting seasons and the type of hunting gear which may be used. The Board may also issue permits to "take" feral pigs for scientific, educational and propagation purposes". "Take" is defined in the statutes as "...injure, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, net, capture or possess". Hunting licenses are required of all, except employees of the Board and persons given permits to destroy game mammals which are...injurious to forest growth or agriculture, or that constitute a nuisance or health hazard". Although one could argue the efficacy and humaneness of methods chosen to "take" feral pigs, the justification and authority to establish those methods is clear in the law. A peculiar provision of this law states that the Department of Land and Natural Resources shall "distribute, free of charge... game [e.g. feral pigs] for the purpose of increasing the food supply of the State...".

Section 195, HRS establishes a statewide "Natural Area Reserve System" (NARS) to preserve in perpetuity land and water areas which support relatively unmodified communities of natural flora and fauna in Hawaii. The law gives broad powers to the Board and the Natural Area Reserve Commission

to "...preserve, manage and protect the reserve system". As the majority of reserves are forested areas attractive to feral pigs, control of these herbivorous mammals is paramount. Currently, hunting is permitted in NARS areas under administrative rules authorized under Section 183D.

Section 195D, HRS (Hawaii's "Endangered Species Act") authorizes the BLNR to "...carry out programs for the conservation, management and protection of such (indigenous, threatened and endangered) species and associated ecosystems". Given that feral pigs are a major component of these native communities, this mandate includes assessing and mitigating deleterious impacts they may have.

Section 205, HRS (the Land Use Law) establishes the "Conservation District" for protecting watersheds, water sources, indigenous or endemic plants, threatened and endangered wildlife and preventing floods and soil erosion. These are to be areas which are "...of value for recreational purposes... and other permitted uses not detrimental to a multiple use conservation concept". Reasonable and laudable ideals, but the crunch comes when managers try to manage areas for multiple uses including sustained yield feral pig hunting and protection of watersheds and native ecosystems.

Section 711-1100, HRS (Cruelty to Animals) defines cruelty as "...every act, omission or neglect whereby unjustifiable physical pain, suffering, or death is caused or permitted". An offense is committed when a person "... intentionally, knowingly or recklessly...mutilates, poisons or kills without need any animal other than insects, vermin and other pests...". Some would argue that almost any method of "taking" wild pigs (other than live-trapping) would fit this definition. Others would point out the words "unjustifiable", "recklessly" and "without need" in the law as exceptions to it in the case of feral pigs which provide recreation and may do damage to vegetation (pests?). This law also explicitly states that nothing in it shall prohibit "...the use of dogs in hunting wildlife including game...".

Hunting rules follow the statutes with respect to pigs- fleshing out the law more precisely, and providing for fair, equitable, and humane use or control. On public hunting areas, Chapter 123 permits rifles, muskets, shotguns, spears and knives (with dogs), and bows and arrows; but prohibits explosive or poison arrows, tracer or full metal jacketed bullets, crossbows, blow guns, pellet guns, air guns, hand guns, traps, slingshots, poison, explosives and snares.

Except for needing a hunting license, there are no restrictions on the taking of feral pigs on private lands. They may be taken at any time using any method and there are no bag limits. In lieu of hunting licenses, the BLNR may issue permits to anyone to control feral pigs which are damaging crops or are a nuisance, a threat to human health and safety, or destructive to plants and animals (Chapter 124). On Public Hunting Areas,

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other prohibitions spelled out in the rules include: 1) hunting pigs at night, 2) hunting pigs from the air, 3) selling pigs, or 4) removing live pigs.

One could conclude from all this that:

1. Feral pigs can be bad because they destroy wildlife habitats, root up native plants, spread noxious weeds, injure valuable watersheds, cause erosion of cultivated lands, inflict crop damage, become nuisances and create health hazards. And that every effort should be taken to reduce them to the lowest possible numbers.

And/or that:

2. Feral pigs can be good because they provide healthy outdoor recreation for hunters; provide meat for families who

cannot afford to buy it; contribute to the economy through the purchase of sporting goods, lodging, and equipment; and are part of the rich cultural heritage of our people. And that every effort and means should be taken to prevent their eradication.

Laws and regulations have evolved over the years recognizing the feral pig as a species prized for its sporting and eating qualities, but also implying that it can have serious economic and ecological impacts if not controlled.

The current question is: can wild pigs continue to provide economic and recreational benefits while we, humanely, reduce their numbers to levels which permit healthy watersheds and native species habitats? It is and will continue to be a challenge for managers, scientists, hunters, environmentalists and animal protectionists.

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## **The 112th Christmas Bird Count: Wednesday, December 14, 2011 to Thursday, January 5, 2012**

We are currently looking for count leaders and volunteer counters for our Statewide Christmas Bird Counts! Please contact Casey at [hiaudsoc@pixi.com](mailto:hiaudsoc@pixi.com) if you would like to participate in a count this year!

From December 14 through January 5 tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas take part in an adventure that has become a family tradition among generations. Families and students, birders and scientists, armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists go out on an annual mission - often before dawn. For over one hundred years, the desire to both make a difference and to experience the beauty of nature has driven dedicated people to leave the comfort of a warm house during the Holiday season.

This year marks the Hawaii Audubon Society 67<sup>th</sup> year. We will be having counts state wide. Please let your local contact person know you will be participating. If you would like to lead a count this year or in the future please contact the HAS office. Here are some of the counts we will be having this year please check our website at [www.hawaiiaudubon.com](http://www.hawaiiaudubon.com) for future updates.

This one day event is great opportunity to meet other birders and volunteers near you. It is also a great chance to learn some new birding skills as well as collecting valuable data for Hawai'i. So please remember to sign up and we look forward to counting with you this Holiday season!

From feeder-watchers and field observers to count compilers and regional editors, everyone who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count does it for love of birds and the excitement of friendly competition -- and with the knowledge that their efforts are making a difference for science and bird conservation everywhere.

We look forward to having you join us!

### **Oahu Christmas Bird Counts**

Make your plans for the upcoming Christmas Bird Counts (CBC). There will be two CBCs on Oahu during the 2011-2012 season.

#### **Honolulu Count**

Saturday, December 17, 2011

This count covers east Oahu from Waimanalo on the east to Aiea on the west and from Diamond Head on the south to Kaneohe on the north.

Compiler Peter Donaldson

Email: pdnldsn.bird@mac.com, Phone: 808-456-5662 (home)

#### **Waipio Count**

Monday, January 2, 2012 (Since New Year's Day is a Sunday, this day is a holiday).

This count covers central Oahu from the leeward slopes of the Koolau Mountains on the east to the Waianae Mountains on the west and from Pearl Harbor on the south to halfway between Wahiawa and Haleiwa on the north.

Compiler David Bremer

Email: bremerd001@hawaii.rr.com

Phone: 808-623-7613 (home)

#### **Maui and Lanai Count**

Contact Sonny Gamponia at [sonnyandi@hotmail.com](mailto:sonnyandi@hotmail.com)

Lanai Dec 16<sup>th</sup>

Maui December 27 and 29

#### **Molokai Count**

December 16<sup>th</sup>

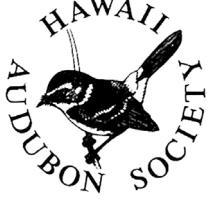
Contact Arleone Dibben Young at [nene@aloha.net](mailto:nene@aloha.net)

#### **Big Island**

December 17<sup>th</sup>

Contact Eldridge Naboa at [eldridge.naboa@gmail.com](mailto:eldridge.naboa@gmail.com)

If you are interested in leading or volunteering for a count please contact Casey at the HAS office at 808-528-1432, or check our website updates. [hiaudsoc@pixi.com](mailto:hiaudsoc@pixi.com), [hawaiiaudubon.com](http://www.hawaiiaudubon.com).



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## Calendar of Events

### Hawai‘i Audubon Society Annual Meeting

**December 12, 2011 6-9 pm**

First Unitarian Church of Honolulu 2500 Pali Hwy in the “Art Gallery” The First Unitarian Church of Honolulu is located on the corner of Niolopa and Pali Hwy.

### Field trips

#### James Campbell National Wildlife Refuge

Saturday January 21 at 3:30

Saturday February 4 at 9am

### Christmas Bird Counts

#### Oahu

**Honolulu** - Saturday, December 17, 2011

Contact Peter Donaldson at pdnldsn.bird@mac.com

**Waipio** - Monday, January 2, 2012

Contact David Bremmer bremerd001@hawaii.rr.com

**Maui** - December 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>

Contact Sonny Gamponia at sonnyandi@hotmail.com

**Lanai** - December 16<sup>th</sup>

Contact Sonny Gamponia at sonnyandi@hotmail.com

**Molokai** - December 21<sup>st</sup>

Contact Arleone Dibben Young at nene@aloha.net

**Big Island** - December 17<sup>th</sup>

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