

FALL HAWAII

OCTOBER 9 – 17, 2009

LEADER: BOB SUNDSTROM

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Glistening tropicbirds, rare and endemic forest birds, one-of-a-kind hawks, and Bristle-thighed Curlews reached by a short and level stroll: our Fall Hawaii tour takes in all of this. In nine days we make the most of the natural history of three of the main Hawaiian Islands—Hawaii, Kauai, and Oahu. Mid-October presents an ideal time for an autumn visit to the northern tropical Pacific. In addition to wonderful birds, many seen nowhere else in the world, Hawaii offers unique tropical forests and the most accessible volcanic realm in the world. Add to that wonderful, balmy weather, superb food, and nice lodging.

Our tour began on Oahu, with a sunset dinner in Waikiki overlooking the Pacific and Waikiki's famous beaches. The next morning we saw sprite-like White Terns as well as a handful of other new species before breakfast—a breakfast overlooking the beach, the ocean, and snorkelers over the reef. We covered a good bit of Oahu during the day's birding to come: there were gorgeous Red-billed Leiothrix up a shady valley trail, endemic Oahu Amakihi and lovely White-rumped Shamas on a forested hillside overlooking Honolulu, and Bristle-thighed Curlews at a traditional wintering spot not far from the famous giant surfing waves of Oahu's North Shore.

The next morning we took a short flight to the next island to the northwest, the emerald-green island of Kauai. By late morning we stood overlooking the blue Pacific and thousands of seabirds. Pterodactyl-like Great Frigatebirds hung overhead, ready to chase after the thousands of Red-footed Boobies that streamed by or perched on the nearby sea cliff. Fledgling Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, still fluffy with down feathers, peeked out from nest burrows. A pair of White-tailed Tropicbirds—the epitome of elegance in seabirds—winged by close overhead. The tropicbirds flew in tandem, one above the other, raising their wings and lowering their tails in a distinctive aerial dance of breeding display. Several pairs of Hawaii's native geese, the Nene, called softly as they padded across grassy expanses of the refuge.

A second day on Kauai drew an utter contrast to the first, as we drove remote unpaved roads into the native forest at 4,000 feet. Forest birds found only in these islands, like Apapanes, Elepaios, and Kauai Amakihis, emerged from the native vegetation. We had excellent studies of a chartreuse male Anianiau and a pair of Akekee, both Kauai endemics. The Akekee we hadn't seen in several years and feared dwindled to a very few, so it came as a remarkable surprise. To reach the entrance to the forest we drove along the rim of Waimea Canyon, a split in the earth nearly half-a-mile deep. Looking down the sheer copper-colored cliffs, we could see numbers of tropicbirds flapping leisurely across the cliff faces, scanning the cliffs for nesting ledges.

Soon the tour reached its final island destination, the island of Hawaii, a.k.a. the aptly named Big Island. The Big Island comprises more area and habitats than Oahu and Kauai combined, and its terrain is defined by five volcanic peaks—three of them still volcanically alive. Arriving in Kona the morning of Day #5, we stopped for lunch at a café tucked in among the Kona coffee farms and with a view of Kealahou Bay 1,500 feet below. Just after lunch we turned up a side street

and soon spotted our first Hawaiian Hawk of the trip, which slowly circled over the hillside neighborhood. Endemic to the Big Island, it is the only native hawk in all the Hawaiian Islands.

The following morning we set off for what would be the most exciting and productive forest birding of the tour, in Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge on the eastern, rainforest face of Mauna Kea. The refuge is closed to the public, but we have gained special permission to enter. On reaching the refuge, we quickly saw scores of Iiwis—unique, scarlet Hawaiian honeycreepers probing the red blossoms of native ohia trees with their long, red, sickle-shaped bills. Before long someone called the group's attention to a vivid orange bird, which turned out to be a bright male Akepa—an endangered bird endemic to the Big Island. We watched another island endemic, the Hawaii Creeper, as it “nuthatched” its way along trunks and branches, and was joined by several other creepers—a family group of creepers still foraging together in early fall. The gruff whistles of the endemic thrush, the Omao, helped us to good views of this gray cousin of New World solitaires.

The holy grail of the Hakalau endangered endemics is the Akiapolaau, or Aki' for short, and it was the one bird that by noon that day still eluded us. A tough bird to find and an island endemic that numbers only in the low hundreds, the yellow Aki' possesses what some have described as a “Swiss Army knife” bill. Its short, straight lower beak is paired with a long, slender, curved, flexible upper beak: the short half hammers like a woodpecker's bill, the upper searches for insects under the bark like a fine probe. Today we were in luck. After another hour of walking down an old jeep road through the forest, a juvenile Akiapolaau began making a distinct begging call, helping us home in on its location in the dense, massive forest. After much staring up into tall native koa trees and in an area that was busy with lots of small native birds, we at last caught up with the young Aki'. The juvenile fluttered its wings repeatedly in a distinctive “come feed me” manner, and we soon had our binoculars on the young bird and two parents as they foraged up and down nearby tree branches. It was a well-earned encounter with one of the islands'—in fact one of the world's—rarest and most distinctively outfitted birds.

The day after our Hakalau adventure, we explored the dry western face of Mauna Kea, in search of the remaining Big Island endemic specialty, the bright yellow Palila of dry tropical forest. A couple of hours of searching led us to a Palila as it called softly from inside a dense shrub; we were able to scope it nicely as it opened a pod of mamane seeds, its favorite food. The same day we came face to face with the Pueo, Hawaii's version of Short-eared Owl, as one perched on a roadside fence post.

On our last full day we explored the natural wonders of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park: craters and lava tubes, square miles of shiny black lava flows from recent decades, a forest studded with massive tree ferns, Black Noddies perched in black lava sea caves, endemic Elepaios at arm's-length, and a Hawaiian Hawk that perched overhead for as long as we cared to admire it.

The final evening of our tour found us at an elegant restaurant in Volcano Village, just outside the national park. The farewell dinner gave us a chance to recount tour highlights, and bring to a close a tour that offered some really terrific birding and vivid memories of unique, rare, and much sought after birds. It was a tour that included great companionship, wonderful tropical

natural history, memorable scenery, lots of fine dining and, too soon it seemed, we were all headed back to the mainland.

DAY BY DAY SUMMARY

- Day 1** Friday, October 9: Arrival in Honolulu (Oahu) and get-acquainted dinner at New Otani Hotel. Night in Waikiki.
- Day 2** Saturday, October 10: Oahu. Birding near Waikiki and Honolulu in morning, including Kapiolani, Pia Valley, and Round Top Rd. Midday across H-2 to Haleiwa on North Shore for lunch. Afternoon birding near Kahuku. Returned to Waikiki via H-2. Night in Waikiki.
- Day 3** Sunday October, 11: Morning flight from Honolulu to Lihue (Kauai). After an early lunch in Kilauea, birded at Kilauea Pt. NWR., then Hanalei NWR and west of Hanalei to the Wainiha powerhouse road, before backtracking to the ResortQuest hotel. First of two nights in Kapaa.
- Day 4** Monday, October 12: Early morning departure for Kokee Forest in northwest part of Kauai, breakfast in Kalaheo. Scenic and birding stops along Waimea Canyon and at Kokee Forest overlooks. Birded well into the forest along back roads, then hiked into the forest, covering about 2 ½ miles round trip. Early afternoon stop at Kokee Museum and General Store. Late afternoon birded the Kekaha area to the sand pits and back roads near Polihale. Dinner at Wrangler's in Waimea. Night in Kapaa.
- Day 5** Tuesday, October 13 Late morning flight from Lihue via Honolulu to Kona on the island of Hawaii. Drove south from Kona to hawk-watch and have lunch overlooking the coast near Honaunau, and a bit of birding on side streets in Captain Cook and Kealahou. Drove north, stopping to bird near Puu Anahulu before arriving at Kamuela Inn for the first of two nights in Kamuela/Waimea.
- Day 6** Wednesday, October 14: Early breakfast and departure for Hakalau Forest NWR (Pua Akala section) on the windward side of Mauna Kea. Birded along the road in and intensively along various trails at Hakalau until mid-afternoon, before retracing the route to Kamuela/Waimea for a second night there. Dinner at Merriman's
- Day 7** Thursday, October 15: After breakfast, drove the Saddle Rd. to bird the Puu Laau area on west side of Mauna Kea. Midday, crossed the Saddle Rd. to Hilo, lunch in Hilo at Café Pesto, then birded at Waiakea Pond in Hilo before driving up to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. Mid-afternoon check-in at Volcano House and afternoon break. Dinner at Volcano House. First of two nights at Volcano House in the National Park.
- Day 8** Friday, October 16: Visited many spots in or near the national park today: First to Kipuka Ki (a.k.a. Bird Park) and Thurston Lava Tube. Then drove down Chain of Craters Rd. to coastline black sea cliffs and Black Noddy roost. After lunch in Volcano Village, walked the Puu Puai and Devastation Trail area, then drove back down Chain of Craters Rd. to explore Mauna Ulu lava fields, then visited Jaggar Museum. Late afternoon option to drive up Mauna Loa Rd. Farewell dinner at Kilauea Lodge in Volcano Village.
- Day 9** Saturday, October 17: Drove to Hilo for departures from the local airport.

BIRD LIST

[LOCATION KEY: O = Oahu K = Kauai H = Hawaii/Big Is.]

NOTE: species in ***CAPITALIZED BOLD ITALICS*** are endangered Hawaiian endemics
species in ***bold italics*** are other Hawaiian Islands endemic species or subspecies
species in **lower case bold** are uncommon to rare, or unusual sightings for Hawaii

GEESE & DUCKS:

Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*) – H; one at Hilo's Waiakea Pond

NENE (*Branta sandvicensis*) – K,H. Seen on Kauai at both national wildlife refuges, and at Hakalau and the Big Island. Endangered, but doing well on Kauai.

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) – H; a small flock at Hilo's Waiakea Pond, origin unknown

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – likely a few of wild origin at Hilo's Waiakea Pond

KOLOA [HAWAIIAN DUCK] (*Anas wyvilliana*) – O,K; near Kahuku on Oahu and at Hanalei refuge on Kauai, with very good views at Hanalei

Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) – K; six at Hilo's Waiakea Pond

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS:

Black Francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*) – K,H; seen best on Kauai in fields north of Kekaha
Gray Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) – H. A covey sunning early morning near Waimea.

Erckel's Francolin (*Francolinus erckelii*) – K,H; the big francolin with the rufous cap, we had lots of excellent views along the roadside; numerous at Big Is. Country Club, along the Saddle Rd. and along the ranch road into Hakalau

Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) – K; at higher elevations in Kokee Forest

Kalij Pheasant (*Lophura leucomelana*) – H; see at Hakalau refuge, and in Bird Park (Kipuka Ki)

Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) – H; along the ranch road into Hakalau refuge

Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – H; many family groups of turkeys from North Kona to Hakalau, and particularly common along the Saddle Rd.

California Quail (*Callipepla californica*) – H; enroute to Hakalau, and big coveys near Puu Laau

TUBENOSES:

Wedge-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus pacificus*) – K. Downy, near-fledglings sitting at the mouth of their natal burrows at Kilauea Pt. NWR.

TROPICBIRDS, BOOBIES, and FRIGATEBIRDS

White-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaeton lepturus*) – K. Wonderful studies of these glistening white seabirds at Kilauea Pt.; also seen in Waimea Canyon and Kalalau lookout on Kauai.

Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*) - K; close views of adults and tawny immatures at Kilauea Pt.

Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*) – K; flying by and roosting on an offshore islet at Kilauea Pt.

HERONS AND IBISES:

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) - O,K,H

Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) - O,K

EAGLES, HAWKS & ALLIES:

I'O [HAWAIIAN HAWK] (*Buteo solitarius*) – H. We saw our first soaring Hawaiian Hawk soaring over a neighborhood in South Kona near Captain Cook. Known as I'o in Hawaiian, it is the only native hawk in all the Islands. We had excellent views of dark and light morph hawks at Hakalau, and an amazing close view of a perched hawk along the Bird Park trail in Volcanoes Park. There was even one along the road the last morning as we drove to the airport.

MOORHENS & COOTS:

COMMON MOORHEN [Hawaiian subspecies] (*Gallinula chloropsis sandvicensis*) – O,K; seen near Kahuku on Oahu, and lots of good views at Hanalei refuge on Kauai

HAWAIIAN COOT (*Fulica alai*) – O,K,H; an endemic coot with a huge white frontal shield

SHOREBIRDS:

Pacific Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis pacifica*) – O,K,H; in just about any grassy area on all the islands, in basic plumage but still with golden feather highlights

BLACK-NECKED STILT [Hawaiian subspecies] (*Himantopus mexicanus knudseni*) – O,K; showing distinctly more black on the face and neck than the North American stilts

Wandering Tattler (*Heteroscelus incanus*) – O; near one of the surfing beaches on the North Shore of Oahu

Bristle-thighed Curlew (*Numenius tahitiensis*) – O. We saw several near Kahuku, just as light rain showers broke out in the afternoon. One of the world's scarcest shorebirds and a much anticipated highlight.

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) – O; wintering migrants

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) – O

JAEGERS, GULLS, & TERNS:

Black Noddy (*Anous minutus melanogenys*) – H. Excellent views along the black volcanic cliffs near the end of Chain of Craters Rd. in Volcanoes National Park. Roosting on the sea cliffs and flying by below. The form we saw is currently considered the light morph of *A. n. melanogenys*, and is restricted to the southeastern Hawaiian islands. Its orange feet and a gray wash on the upper surface of the tail are distinctive.

White Tern [Common Fairy Tern] (*Gygis alba*) – O. The first morning walk into Kapiolani Park we had good views of these buoyant, pure white terns as they fluttered overhead.

SANDGROUSE, PIGEONS & DOVES:

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse – a small flock flew by quickly

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) - all three islands

Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*) - all three islands

Zebra Dove (*Geopelia striata*) - all three islands

PARROTS AND ALLIES:

Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) – O. A small flock in Kapiolani Pk. Well established on Kauai and apparently Maui too; established on Oahu in the Nuuanu Valley since the early 1970's. Native to Africa and Asia, feral populations of this large parakeet are now established in many parts of the world, including North America.

OWLS:

Pueo [Short-eared Owl - Hawaiian subspecies] {*Asio flammeus sandwichensis*} – H. Several very good views along the Saddle Rd. of the Islands' endemic owl, the Pueo, a unique form of Short-eared Owl.

MONARCHS, FANTAILS, and ALLIES

Elepaio (*Chasiempis sandwichensis*) – K,H. Elepaio forms are likely to be split by island into three separate species. Altogether, we saw: the Kauai form (*sclateri*), and the Hawaii forms *bryani* (Puu Laau) and *ridgewayi* (at Hakalau Forest NWR and Bird Park). The Kauai Elepaio was very confiding in general, and the pair we saw in Bird Park came within a few meters at eye level.

LARKS

Sky Lark (*Alauda arvensis*) – H; especially prevalent on Mauna Kea, both along the road to Hakalau and the road up to Puu Laau

BULBULS

Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) – O,K; common on Oahu

Red-whiskered Bulbul (*Pycnonotus jocusus*) – O; Kapiolani Park and Pia Valley

OLD WORLD WARBLERS

Japanese Bush-Warbler (*Cettia diphone*) – K; near the Kekaha sand pits, one of these secretive birds flew in close and sang, and showed itself well in the top of a shrub

THRUSHES

White-rumped Shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*) – O,K; fine views of an elegant, nonnative thrush

Omao [Hawaiian Thrush] (*Myadestes obscurus*) – H. An island endemic, seen well at Hakalau NWR. Its gruff "police whistle" call became a familiar sound.

BABBLERS

Melodious Laughing-Thrush (*Garrulax canorus*) – K,H. A very long and loud singer, but tricky to get a good look at.

Red-billed Leiothrix (*Leiothrix lutea*) – O,K,H. A bird that can be very hard to see, we had terrific views of these beautiful small birds in Oahu's Pia Valley, and saw them again on the Big Island.

WHITE-EYES

Japanese White-eye (*Zosterops japonicus*) – O,K,H; ubiquitous on the three islands

MIMIDS

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottus*) – K

MYNAS

Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) – widespread on all three islands

BUNTINGS, SPARROWS & ALLIES

Saffron Finch (*Sicalis flaveola*) – H; good numbers of these deep yellow finches on the Big Is.

Red-crested Cardinal (*Paroaria coronata*) – O,K; a lovely exotic and quite tame

Yellow-billed Cardinal (*Paroaria capitata*) – H; on the west side of the Big Island

TROUPIALS & ALLIES

Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) – K; heard

SALTATORS, CARDINALS & ALLIES

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – O,K,H

NON-NATIVE CARDUELINE FINCHES

House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) –O,K,H

Yellow-fronted Canary (*Serinus mozambicus*) – O,H; a handsome exotic from Africa

HAWAIIAN HONEYCREEPERS (DREPANIDINES)

PALILA (*Loxoides bailleui*) – H. An endangered endemic of the dry side of Mauna Kea, we scoped one at close range after a couple hours of searching for this shy species.

Hawaiian/Common Amakihi (*Hemignathus virens*) – H. Excellent views at Hakalau and Puu Laau, especially prevalent and visible at the latter spot

Kauai Amakihi (*Hemignathus stejnegeri*) – K. A separate amakihi species with a larger and more down-curved bill, we saw this Kauai island endemic very well in Kokee Forest.

Oahu Amakihi (*Hemignathus chloris*) – O. The first Hawaiian honeycreeper species seen on the tour, we found one in a park off of Round Top Rd. above Honolulu. An Oahu endemic.

Anianiau (*Hemignathus parvus*) – K. A wonderful, close view of a chartreuse male in Kokee Forest, Its overall scarcity illustrates an ongoing decline of native birds in Kauai forests.

AKIAPOLAAU (*Hemignathus munroi*) – H. At the very end of the trail into Hakalau Forest NWR, we heard and then saw a begging juvenile as it worked a big koa tree alongside its parents. The rarest of all the native birds seen on the tour, we were very lucky to see this species whose entire population is down to a few hundred. Endemic to the island of Hawaii.

HAWAII CREEPER (*Oreomystis mana*) – H. Several very nice views of this island endemic in Hakalau Forest NWR.

AKEKEE (*Loxops caeruleirostris*) – K. Two different birds, a male and a female at different spots, along the Alakai Trail. We were very fortunate to see this species, which has declined sharply in recent years and hadn't been seen on the Hawaii tours in several years.

AKEPA (*Loxops coccineus*) – H. Good views of several tangerine orange males (at Hakalau Forest NWR). Also heard singing at several spots in the forest.

Iiwi (*Vestiaria coccinea*) – H. We saw dozens of the unique, scarlet honeycreepers as they probed ohia blossoms with their sickle-shaped red bills. The Iiwis' squeaky, raspy songs and calls were the principal background sound of Hakalau.

Apapane (*Himatione sanguinea*) – K,H. The other red honeycreeper, we heard the Apapane's gentle songs on both Kauai and Hawaii, and we had many good views of Apapanes coming in to feed on red ohia blossoms. Especially prevalent in the forested levels of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) – all three islands

WAXBILLS (ESTRILDID FINCHES)

Lavender Waxbill (*Estrilda caerulescens*) – H. In a roadside patch of tall grass near Kealakekua.

Common Waxbill (*Estrilda astrild*) – O,K; in Kapiolani Park and elsewhere on Oahu; it was a surprise to see a couple also on Kauai along the road down to Kealakekua Bay.

African (Warbling) Silverbill (*Lonchura catans*) – H. Very scarce this trip, just a few flying by.

Nutmeg Mannikin (*Lonchura punctulata*) – O,K,H

Chestnut Mannikin (*Lonchura malacca*) – K; tiny, plump, chestnut colored birds with black hoods and heavy blue-gray beaks

Java Sparrow (*Padda oryzivora*) – O,K,H; the little finch with the puffin face

MAMMALS and HERPS

Small Indian Mongoose – O,H

Gold Dust Day Gecko – H; nonnative

Coqui Frog – H; nonnative

Feral Pig – H; nonnative

INSECTS

Kamehameha Butterfly (*Vanessa tameamea*) – H; one of the two butterfly species endemic to the Hawaiian Islands

Sword-tailed Cricket (*Laupala cerasina*) – Dan spotted one at the Thurston Lava Tube, near the interpretive sign describing the species. Believe it or not, about 240 species of crickets have evolved from the separate arrival in Hawaii of a tree cricket, a sword-tail cricket, and a ground cricket.

Monarch Butterfly

Gulf Fritillary