

FALL HAWAII

OCTOBER 11-19, 2006

Leader: Brad Schram

Compiled by: Brad Schram

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.
2525 Wallingwood Drive, Suite 1003
Austin, TX 78746
www.ventbird.com**

TOUR REPORT
FALL HAWAII
October 11-19, 2006

By Brad Schram

Our October 2006 Fall Hawaii tour will hold a unique place in our memories due to the unusual series of circumstances we encountered during our trip. A 6.7 Richter Scale earthquake provides a punctuation mark to any experience, along the lines of the question: "Where were you when the Hawaii quake hit?" The inevitable delayed flight, the regrettable airline-lost luggage, the flood(s), and the culminating hotel fire alarm on the last night will remain notable in our memories. Happily, many fine memories of interesting endemic birds from Hawaii's amazing laboratory of evolution will hold equally memorable place with natural disasters and man-made inconveniences!

Oahu's north shore stands in sharp contrast to the developed bustle of the south, with its Honolulu traffic and Waikiki artificiality. Our first day of birding focused on the north shore, which produced excellent looks at Hawaiian Island endemic water bird species and subspecies in ponds along the rural highway. Hawaiian Stilt, a subspecies of Black-necked Stilt, and the endangered Hawaiian subspecies of Common Moorhen were joined by the endemic Hawaiian Duck (Koloa) and Hawaiian Coot for lingering views. The most memorable bird of the day, however, was clearly Bristle-thighed Curlew! Six of these trans-Pacific migrants from remote Alaskan breeding grounds fed leisurely in short grass as we enjoyed fine scope looks at their behavior and subtle but unique field marks.

An uneventful flight to Kauai held no hint of the dramatic events to follow. Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge was beautiful. The Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, Great Frigatebirds, tropicbirds, and Red-footed Boobies delighted all; the borderline tame Nene—the endangered Hawaiian goose— instantly became a continuing group favorite wherever we found it.

Following a morning's birding highlighted by Kauai Amakihi and confiding Elepaio in the rain of Kokee, Kauai's lovely native forest state park, we fled the rain, the fog of Waimea Canyon—and the throng of the Queen Emma Festival—for lowland birding. Heavy rains intensified. Storm drains overflowed during lunch in Waimea, but a post-lunch drive to the Sand Ponds to the northwest delivered us from the heaviest storm clouds. A male Black Francolin greeted us at the ponds, where good scope views of Wandering Tattlers and Ruddy Turnstones revived soggy spirits.

There is no preparation for an earthquake. One minute one is going about the routine of getting ready to go to breakfast, then one feels the earth move, intensify its movement, then reside. All at breakfast agreed the jolt was pretty substantial, but it wasn't until after breakfast that we became aware that the epicenter was hundreds of miles distant—off the northwest shore of Hawaii, the Big Island, our destination later that morning! Lack of hard information at the Lihue, Kauai, airport proved frustrating, but amazingly we actually left for Kona only a couple of hours past our scheduled time. Finding that the entire group's luggage, save for a couple of articles, had been lost required a wait at the lost-baggage claim counter, followed by the inevitable filling out of forms. Ironically, we found that presentation of our forms was unnecessary 24 hours later when we returned to retrieve the found luggage. If we said we saw our bag in the pile, that was good enough!

Driving north from Kona we dodged large boulders of lava from the road cut above, and noticed the occasional collapsed retaining wall. Otherwise, there was little overt evidence of the serious earthquake. We arrived safely at our hotel in Waimea, although the delays resulting from the

day's events had taken away any chance of serious birding that afternoon. A memorable dinner at Merriman's, a fine Waimea restaurant, capped an eventful day.

The following day's birding in the dry Mamane forest at about 5,000 feet altitude gave us our first close encounter with the I'o, the endangered Hawaiian Hawk. Although the Palila eluded us, the Common Amakihi, and introduced Red-billed Leiothrix and Yellow-fronted Canaries put on a show. We learned subsequently, from a US Wildlife Service biologist, that another group birding the same area four days earlier also missed the endemic Palila, which had apparently vacated the area for better feeding grounds. Following a late lunch we returned to Kona for our baggage, with a few stops for birding along the way. To our delight a feeder in a residential district above the airport had attracted 10 to 15 Saffron Finches. Dinner in Waimea took place during a torrential downpour, flooding the town's low areas. Schools in Waimea were closed the following day.

We awoke to a 4.9 aftershock at 5:28 AM, followed by vehicle packing and breakfast. A two-hour drive to Hakalau National Wildlife Refuge on the Saddle Road across Mauna Kea's slope presented fantastic volcanic views in the clean highland air. Erckel's Francolin was one of the commonest roadside birds, while Sky Larks were quite common. Once inside the refuge itself, the beauty of Hawaii's native forest overshadowed all other events. Twisted Ohi'a trees, ancient, gnarled, and festooned with red blooms, provided a platform for native honeycreepers in surprising numbers! The brilliant I'iwi, possibly Hawaii's most colorful bird, was quite common in the blooming trees, its calls always apparent. Common Amakihi and Apapane were likewise commonly seen and heard. The endangered Akepa, the males resplendent in tangerine-orange, came to our squeak from a Koa tree. A Barn Owl flushed nearby; a Hawaiian Hawk dashed through below treetop level. The Hawaiian thrush, the Omao, called constantly; one responding bird perched long enough for all to get repeat scope views of this subtly beautiful endemic thrush. All agreed that this gorgeous section of forest was the birding highlight of the trip to that point. Our subsequent drive to Volcano House, in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, was surprisingly uneventful—if one ignored the dense fog encountered on Mauna Loa's mid-altitude slope.

Awaking to constant calls from the abundant Apapane in the Ohi'a forest surrounding Volcano House, we breakfasted before an extravagant view of the steaming crater on whose rim Volcano House perches. The morning's forest birding and lava tube-walking produced new birds and wonders. In mid-afternoon we drove the Chain of Craters Road to the park's shore. Black Noddies flew by our cliff-top viewing point at close range; a Great Frigatebird drifted overhead. A late afternoon walk across the ropey Pahoehoe lava to a vantage point was challenging; the walk back with flashlights could well be described as "adventurous"! The purpose of the walk however, a night view of orange-red lava flowing into the sea across a small bay from us, made the exertion worth it. The sight of flowing, glowing, lava—its color reflecting on the overhanging steam—will not be forgotten. Truly the elemental Hawaiian experience! We returned in time for our final dinner, perched again on the caldera rim.

Our last night could not pass uneventfully, however. Following the final dinner and checklist session we retreated to our rooms for a much deserved rest before our morning flights. After all that had transpired on this tour, the (false) fire alarm rousting us from our rooms met with bemusement rather than outrage. After all, flexibility defined us.

FALL HAWAII TOUR
October 11-19, 2006

DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY

- Day 1 October 11. Arrive in Honolulu. Dinner at New Otani Hotel, no meeting with Brad Schram, substitute tour leader, due to late arrival.
- Day 2 October 12. Bird Kapiolani Park across from the hotel before breakfast after meeting Brad. Bird the Pia Valley, and attempt to bird Round Top Road but unable to due to wash out and road closure. Late morning drive across island on H2 to Haleiwa for lunch.

- Afternoon birding near Kahuku, dodging raindrops. Returned to Waikiki, night in Waikiki.
- Day 3 October 13. Morning flight from Honolulu to Lihue, Kauai. Birded Kilauea Point NWR after lunch, then beach north of Kilauea Lighthouse before returning to Kapaa and our hotel.
- Day 4 October 14. Early morning departure for Kokee Forest, stopping in Kalaheo for breakfast. Finding Waimea Canyon fogged-in we nevertheless birded around a couple of the overlooks and then trails above the Kokee General Store. The region around the store became jammed with hundreds of people for the Queen Emma Festival. Rain moved in and we descended, having lunch at a sandwich shop in Waimea as the water rose outside, flooding the storm drains. Following lunch we drove to the Sand Ponds to the west, where we looked for shore birds between rain clouds. Night in Kapaa.
- Day 5 October 15. While in our rooms just before breakfast we felt a stiff jolting earthquake, which proved to be the 6.7 tremor offshore just northwest of Hawaii's Kona Coast, our destination today. On arrival at Lihue airport we were told that the Kona Airport was temporarily closed due to the quake, to re-open at an indeterminate time. After consideration of our options with little firm data we decided to check in, although airplanes were not at that moment flying. To our surprise, we flew to Kona only two hours later than our late morning scheduled flight, arriving to an airport that seemed unscathed. The airline had lost our luggage, which required an hour of apologies, form-acquisition and filling-out. The road north from Kona to our hotel in Waimea was littered with lava rocks that had shaken loose from the road cut above; the lost time due to the quake removed birding time this day. Night in Waimea.
- Day 6 October 16. Morning trip to Puu Laau area along the Kilohana Road on the west side of Mauna Kea above the Saddle Road. We birded the Mamane forest looking for Palila. After lunch on our return to Waimea we drove back to Kona Airport to retrieve our luggage, which had since arrived. We stopped en route to drive through forest up Kaloko Drive on the side of Hualalai volcano, looking for birds. After retrieving baggage we drove neighborhoods above the airport before finding a feeder frequented by a flock of lovely Saffron Finches. Returning to Waimea in time for a deluge, we went to bed unsure of the next day's possibilities.
- Day 7 October 17. Although Waimea's schools closed this day as a result of the night's flooding, the storm seemed to have passed through by morning. We had an early breakfast and departed along the Saddle Road for Hakalau National Wildlife Refuge, two hours distant. Our permit allowed us to get behind the locked gates 10.5 miles of good lava dirt road from the paved highway. The native Ohi'a and Koa forest in Hakalau was truly beautiful, and proved to be filled with native birds in good weather. Following a late picnic lunch at Hakalau NWR we descended to Hilo, and from there to Hawaii Volcano National Park and our hotel on the rim, Volcano House Lodge.
- Day 8 October 18. Following breakfast we birded Bird Park, around the Lava Tube, and Halemaumau Crater. A break following lunch allowed for exploration of the hotel's vicinity and the park Visitor Center. A drive down Chain of Craters Road to its end at sea cliffs and a somewhat recent lava flow across the road. We 'scoped Black Noddies on the sea cliffs and then walked out to a vantage point from which we could see lava flowing into the sea across a bay, coloring the steam cloud red. Return to Volcano House for a final dinner and night in the hotel.
- Day 9. October 19. An early departure from Volcano House to the Hilo airport for scheduled departures.

BIRD LIST

Location Key:

O= Oahu; K= Kauai; H= Hawaii

NOTE: species in ***CAPITALIZED BOLD ITALICS*** are endangered Hawaiian endemics
 species in ***bold italics*** are other Hawaiian islands endemic species
 species in **lower case bold** are unusual as to the season or unusual in Hawaii

TUBENOSES

Wedge-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus pacificus*) K. Six to eight fluffy young birds at or near their nest burrows at Kilauea Point NWR. Some right at our feet.

TROPICBIRDS, BOOBIES, and FRIGATEBIRDS

White-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaeton lepturus*) K, H. A few birds hanging around Kilauea Pt.; our best looks, however, were of birds flying in and above craters surrounding the caldera below Volcano House in Volcanoes NP.

Red-tailed Tropicbird (*P. rubricauda*) K. A lone adult bird flying low over the ocean off Kilauea Point was unusual this close to shore in October.

Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*) K. Hundreds seen on hillsides around Kilauea Pt. NWR and flying by at close range.

Great Frigatebird (*Fregata minor*) K, H. A few birds overhead at Kilauea Pt. NWR were expected, but the lone adult male overhead on the south slope of Mauna Kea above the Hakalau Road was a surprise.

HERONS and IBISES

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) O, K. In various manifestations: astride horses, following cows, tractors, atop guard rails, at roadside....

Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) O, K. Darker than our mainland form.

GEESE and DUCKS

NENE (*Branta sandvicensis*) K, H. Close encounters with this gorgeous, endemic, endangered goose at Kilauea Pt. NWR Kauai, and Hakalau NWR on Hawaii. All agree: a trip highlight.

KOLOA (HAWAIIAN DUCK) (*Anas wyvilliana*) O, K. Excellent nearby 'scope looks at this endemic.

EAGLES, HAWKS and ALLIES

I'O (HAWAIIAN HAWK) (*Buteo solitarius*) H. Outstanding looks at a perched bird near the Kilohana Road, a few fly-overs, a bird over Hakalau NWR, and another perched, calling bird at Bird Park.

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS

Black Francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*) K, H. A male crossed the road ahead of us near the Sand Ponds west of Waimea Kauai, and another feeding at roadside along the Saddle Road were the only ones seen.

Erckel's Francolin (*F. erckelii*) K, H. One along the road on the way to Kokee Kauai, but many seen along the Saddle Road and, especially, the dirt road in to Hakalau NWR.

Gray Francolin (*F. pondicerianus*) H. A few birds associating with Chukars near the road in to Hakalau NWR were the only members of this species seen.

Chukar (*Alectoris chukar*) H. A large flock of Chukar amongst lava rock next to the road in to Hakalau NWR.

Kalij Pheasant (*Lophura leucomelana*) H. Two family groups of this showy species seen along the trail in Bird Park. These birds, acclimated to hikers, were very cooperative allowing close approach and lingering views.

Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) O, K, H. Although one could be forgiven for doubting the wildness of each individual seen, pure birds of native stock were seen at many venues. Really very showy birds—occasionally discussed with satisfaction at meal time.

Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) O, H.

Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) H. A few flocks seen in fields alongside the Saddle Road.

MOORHENS and COOTS

COMMON MOORHEN [Hawaiian subspecies] (*Gallinula chloropsis sandvichensis*) O, K.

Close-up views at James Campbell Refuge entrance on Oahu, at Sand Ponds on Kauai.

HAWAIIAN COOT (*Fulica alai*) O, K. "Just a coot", but an endemic species endangered due to limited habitat.

SHOREBIRDS

Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis pacifica*) O, K, H. Virtually ubiquitous, this interesting cross-Pacific migrant could be found on virtually all lawns, parks, grassy roadsides, and even in Kauai highlands in grassy roadsides as well!

BLACK-NECKED STILT [Hawaiian subspecies] (*Hymantopus mexicanus knudseni*) O, K.

Well-seen in 'scope at ponds, the extent of the black on the neck showing the difference. Wandering Tattler (*Heteroscelus incanus*) K. Two birds at the Sand Ponds.

Bristle-thighed Curlew (*Numenius tahitiensis*) O. After much searching at Kahuku we finally spied six birds actively feeding in uncut grass. Fine 'scope views for all of this amazing cross-Pacific migrant from the Alaskan breeding grounds.

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) H, K. Seen foraging on golf course fairways as well as more traditionally foraging around the Sand Ponds on Kauai.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) O, K. Only a few.

JAEGERS, GULLS and TERNS

Black Noddy (*Anous minutus melanogenys*) H. Seen from the cliffs along the shore of Volcanoes National Park, this Pacific subspecies could be seen in the 'scope to have the pale upper surface of the tail and orange feet.

White Tern [Common Fairy Tern] (*Gygis alba*) O. A half-dozen birds flying around overhead at Kapiolani Park, Waikiki, the first morning.

SANDGROUSE, PIGEONS and DOVES

Rock Dove (*Columba livea*) O, K, H. Ubiquitous around larger towns/cities.

Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*) O, K, H. Very common around towns and habitation.

Zebra Dove (*Geopelia striata*) O, K, H. Like its other introduced cousins, very common throughout.

Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) H. A fly-by while driving.

OWLS

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) H. A very pale bird scared from its perch in the forest at Hakalau NWR gave us a fine fly-by look. This species introduced to the islands from N. America.

LARKS

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) H. Very common in grasslands on Mauna Kea's flank.

BULBULS

Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) O, K, H.

Red-whiskered Bulbul (*P. jocosus*) O. Unlike nearly ubiquitous cousin, seen only in Pia Valley.

MONARCHS, FANTAILS, and ALLIES

Elepaio (*Chasiempis sandwichensis*) O, K, H. Currently the forms on various islands are considered subspecies, however it is likely that they will be split in the future into three different species, based on residence and separation. Interestingly, the highland form in the Kilohana Rd. region on Hawaii showed us its largely white head, whereas the form at Hakalau refuge in the wet forest was a warm almost rusty color atop—making one wonder if the split will be into three or four species.

THRUSHES

White-rumped Shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*) O, K. A truly lovely introduced bird with a big voice, enjoyed by all.

Omao [Hawaiian Thrush] (*Myadestes obscurus*) H. Seen well by all at Hakalau NWR, heard and seen by some at Volcano NP.

BABLERS

Melodious Laughing-Thrush (*Garrulax canorus*) H. Their rollicking songs rang throughout Bird Park with a little coaxing. We finally had two birds quite close, seen well by most although they tend to hide even as they broadcast their presence into the next county.
Red-billed Leiothrix (*Leiothrix lutea*) O, H. Another bird with a big voice, but seen with difficulty. Seen with patience both in Pia Valley, Oahu, and along Kilohana Rd. Hawaii.

MIMIDS

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) K. A few seen on Kauai only.

MYNAS

Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) O, K, H. Hard to miss in all habitats save pelagic.

WHITE-EYES

Japanese White-eye (*Zosterops japonicus*) O, K, H. Virtually ubiquitous on all three islands.

EMBERIZIDS

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) O, K, H. A very successful introduction to the islands.
Red-crested Cardinal (*Paroaria coronata*) O, K. An attractive exotic introduction.
Yellow-billed Cardinal (*P. capitata*) H. Close-up looks for almost all of a pavement bird at the lost luggage counter in Kona Airport—the only one seen.
Saffron Finch (*Sicalis flaveola*) H. Spectacular close looks at feeder birds in a neighborhood above the Kona Airport.

INTRODUCED CARDUELINE FINCHES

House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) O, K, H.
Yellow-fronted Canary O, H.

HAWAIIAN HONEYCREEPERS and FINCHES

Common Amakihi (*Hemignathus virens*) H. Common indeed in the highlands of Big Island.
Kauai Amakihi (*H. stejnegeri*) K. One bird in particular very cooperative, teeing for all to admire.
HAWAII CREEPER (*Oreomystis mana*) H. A fleeting look at this endangered endemic.
AKEPA (*Loxops coccineus*) H. Another endangered endemic, this fabulously orange bird finally gave us fine looks as it foraged high above at Hakalau NWR.
liwi (*Vestiaria coccinea*) H. To our delight, and the refuge biologist's surprise, this gorgeous endemic species was commonly seen at Hakalau NWR. A definite group favorite!
Apapane (*Himatione sanguinea*) K, H. Seen with difficulty in rain in the quiet forest at Kokee, but easily seen on Hawaii, especially around Volcano House where it is the commonest species in the native Ohi'a forest around the hotel.

OLD WORLD SPARROW

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) O, K, H.

ESTRELDID FINCHES

Common Waxbill (*Estrilda astrid*) O. Abundant in park-like settings.
Nutmeg Mannikin (*Lonchura punctulata*) K, H. Common in urban settings.
Chestnut Mannikin (*L. malacca*) K. Common in roadside grasses.
Java Sparrow (*Padda oryzivora*) O, K, H. Abundant near habitation.