

FALL HAWAII

OCTOBER 17 – 25, 2008

LEADER: BOB SUNDSTROM

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Tour Report, Itinerary and Lists Compiled by Bob Sundstrom

Our three-island Fall Hawaii tour began on the island of Oahu. From our hotel in Waikiki, it was but a short stroll to terrific views of angelic White Terns, perched and flying close overhead. During breakfast on the hotel lanai overlooking Waikiki beach, a Brown Booby flew over surfers and swimmers near the shoreline. Driving after breakfast to a nearby wooded valley, we found the Oahu form of the Elepaio, Hawaii's endemic Old World flycatcher. In the same valley we watched a Melodious Laughing-Thrush pour out its loud, rollicking song, while nearby an adult Red-billed Leiothrix fed a begging fledgling. Soon we were driving across pineapple fields toward the North Shore, home of the big surfing waves and, for birders, a good spot to find one of the world's scarcest shorebirds—the Bristle-thighed Curlew. As we walked within sight of the ocean-side dunes, a first Bristle-thighed Curlew flew right across our path, showing off its signature tawny upper tail as nicely as a painting in a field guide. Nearby we scoped a total of six of the scarce curlews as they foraged near the dunes.

By mid-morning we were standing on a scenic overlook on the island of Kauai, watching some of the world's loveliest seabirds. First a dapper White-tailed Tropicbird flapped steadily by, its astonishingly long tail trailing behind. Soon after, we caught sight of a glistening white Red-tailed Tropicbird, with red bill and fine, wire-like red tail streamers. More of a winter nester than fall visitor to this spot, we were astonished to find two pairs of Red-tailed Tropicbirds already in full courtship aerial display. As one tropicbird hovered, it began to backpedal, dropping at the same time, making a reverse circle around its potential mate, while rasping out its distinctive call. Huge white Red-footed Boobies perched or flew by the cliff. Great Frigatebirds, which hung overhead like enormous bats, then dove to chase after tropicbirds. Wedge-tailed Shearwaters peered out from burrows in the ground, downy nestlings within a few weeks of fledging, as pairs of Nenes (endangered Hawaiian Geese, the state bird) strolled unassumingly on the grass.

A second day on Kauai took us along majestic Waimea Canyon, rightly known as "Hawaii's Grand Canyon," and to 4,000-foot overlooks onto the emerald Kalalau Valley, with the blue Pacific below. We moved from scenic views to serious birding, walking well back into the native tropical forest, where we found such Kauai endemic forest birds as Anianiau and Kauai Amakihi, as well as Apapanes and Elepaios. Kauai's native forest birds presently face a serious decline, likely due to disease, so it was a welcome sight to find these birds in the forest. Returning to sea level, we watched a Wandering Tattler stalk among scores of Pacific Golden-Plovers, while a very-rare-for-Hawaii Common Tern sat nearby.

Soon we were off to "The Big Island" of Hawaii, the final of the tour's three islands. Starting south on the Kona (west) side of Hawaii, we spotted our first Hawaiian Hawk in short order. This hawk, known as I'o in Hawaiian, is the only native hawk in all the Islands. An endangered species, we had excellent luck during our stay on the Big Island, seeing Hawaiian Hawks on all four days, including one perched along a back country road. We also had terrific views of the Islands' endemic owl, the Pueo, a unique form of Short-eared Owl. One Pueo perched on a low

bush just off the road, staring us down with its huge lemon-yellow eyes, before loping off into the air against a backdrop of clouds and volcanic peaks.

The premier birding day on the Big Island took us into remote Hakalau Forest, where we had superb views of scores of native forest birds. Scarlet Iiwis with red, scimitar-like bills were ever-present, foraging in red ohia blossoms and offering their squeaky songs and calls. Tangerine-colored Akepas and nuthatch-like Hawaiian Creepers, both endangered Big Island endemics, gave us great views, as did the endemic Omao, a gray thrush related to the New World solitaires. Capping the day's incredible birding was a family group of Akiapolaau, whose long name is often shortened to just "the Aki." A tough bird to find and an island endemic that numbers only in the low hundreds, the yellow Aki' possesses what some call a "Swiss Army knife" bill. Its short, straight lower beak is topped by a long, slender, curved, flexible upper beak: the short half hammers like a woodpecker's bill, and the upper searches for insects under the bark like a fine probe.

We made the most of a day-and-a-half in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, where we stayed in the Volcano House lodge on the rim of Kilauea Volcano. The first evening we watched—from a respectful distance—as nearby Halemaumau Crater sent a massive steam plume into the sky against a sensational red sunset. As the sky darkened, the base of the steam plume glowed an eerie pink, while we scoped Jupiter and its moons overhead. The following day we toured the national park, taking in Black Noddies along the black lava sea cliffs, and red Apapanes and elegant Kalij Pheasants in the forest. We walked through a massive lava tube, and hiked out to ancient Hawaiian petroglyphs, some perhaps 1,000 years old. A final meal in an elegant restaurant in nearby Volcano Village made for an apt finale to a tour that offered good companionship, wonderful tropical natural history, much memorable scenery, lots of fine dining, and real volcanic fire.

DAY BY DAY SUMMARY

- Day 1** Friday, October 17: Arrival in Honolulu (Oahu) and get-acquainted dinner at New Otani Hotel. Night in Waikiki.
- Day 2** Saturday, October 18: Oahu. Birding near Waikiki and Honolulu in morning, including Kapiolani Park and Pia Valley. Late morning 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, 19: Morning flight from Honolulu to Lihue (Kauai). Birded late morning at Kilauea Pt. NWR. After lunch in Kilauea, birded Hanalei NWR and west of Hanalei, before backtracking to the ResortQuest hotel. First of two nights in Kapaa.
- Day 4** Monday, October 20: 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, taking along a portable lunch, covering about 2 ½ miles round trip. Early afternoon stop at Kokee Museum/General Store. Late afternoon birded the Kekaha area to the sand pits as well as the Hanapepe salt ponds. Dinner at Wrangler's in Waimea. Night in Kapaa.
- Day 5** Tuesday, October 21: 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 Captain Cook. 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 22: 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 23: 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. Checked in at Volcano House. Afternoon break before visit to Jaggars Museum overlook on steaming Halemaumau Crater, sunset, planet watching. Dinner at Volcano House. First of two nights at Volcano House in the National Park.

Day 8 Friday, October 24: 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. On return uphill, stopped to explore Mauna Ulu lava fields and Puu Puai/Devastation Trail. Lunch at Thai Thai. Afternoon option to hike out petroglyph trail at near coastline. Farewell dinner at Kilauea Lodge in Volcano Village.

Day 9 Saturday, October 25: After breakfast at the Volcano House, 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. Its neck ruffles and engaging demeanor made it one of the tour favorites.

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; at Campbell and Hanalei NWRs

Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) – K; at the Kekaha sand pits

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS:

Black Francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*) – K,H; seen best on the Big Island.

Gray Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) – H. A small covey on the Big Island golf course.

Erckel's Francolin (*Francolinus erckelii*) – K,H; the big francolin with the rufous cap, we had lots of excellent views along the roadside; especially numerous 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; close enough to photograph in Bird Park (Kipuka Ki)
Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) – O,K,H
Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – H; there seemed to be family groups of turkeys everywhere
from North Kona to Hakalau, and particularly common enroute to Hakalau
California Quail (*Callipepla californica*) – H; 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. An adult or two flying well offshore.

TROPICBIRDS, BOOBIES, and FRIGATEBIRDS

Red-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaeton rubricauda*) - K. At Kilauea Pt. More of a winter nester than
fall visitor to this spot, it was highly unusual to find two pairs of Red-tailed Tropicbirds
already in aerial courtship display. As one tropicbird hovered, it began to backpedal,
dropping at the same time, making a reverse circle around its potential mate, while
rasping out its distinctive call.

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

Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*) - K; close views of adults and tawny immatures at Kilauea Pt.
Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*) – O,K; flying by the shoreline at Waikiki and at Kilauea Pt.
Great Frigatebird (*Fregata minor*) - O,K; chasing tropicbirds at Kilauea Pt. NWR

HERONS AND IBISES:

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

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

EAGLES, HAWKS & ALLIES:

I'O [HAWAIIAN HAWK] (*Buteo solitarius*) – H. Great results on this endangered endemic. We
were barely south of Kona when Roy spotted the first hawk, serendipitously close to an
ideal pullout along the highway. Known as I'o in Hawaiian, it is the only native hawk in
all the Islands. We saw Hawaiian Hawks on all four days on the Big Island, including a
mixed light and dark morph pair at Hakalau, a couple of blonde immatures, and a hawk
perched on a small tree along a back country road.

MOORHENS & COOTS:

COMMON MOORHEN [Hawaiian subspecies] (*Gallinula chloropsis sandvicensis*) – K; seen
mostly near Hanalei NWR and the Kekaha sand pits 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; although widespread and in most grassy
spots on all the islands, the most impressive concentration was late afternoon at the
Hanapepe salt ponds and adjacent airstrip

BLACK-NECKED STILT [*Hawaiian subspecies*] (*Himantopus mexicanus knudseni*) – O,K,H; showing distinctly more black on the face and neck than the North American stilts
Wandering Tattler (*Heteroscelus incanus*) – K,H; scoped at the Hanapepe salt ponds; a close fly-by at the Black Noddy cliffs on Hawaii

Bristle-thighed Curlew (*Numenius tahitiensis*) – O. One of the world's scarcest shorebirds. As we walked within sight of the ocean-side dunes near Kahuku, a first Bristle-thighed Curlew flew right across our path, showing off its signature tawny upper tail as nicely as a painting in a field guide. Nearby we scoped a total of six of the scarce curlews as they foraged near the dunes. As one last curlew foraged on the golf course, we even scoped the bristles at the base of the legs! A much anticipated highlight.

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) - O,K; in grassy fields and along shorelines

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) – O

JAEGERS, GULLS, & TERNS:

Common Tern – K. One at Hanapepe salt ponds, a rare visitor to the Hawaiian Islands

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. Dozens were roosting on the sea cliffs and in an adjacent sea cave. 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 were greeted by as many as a dozen of these dainty, pure white terns as they fluttered over the *Ficus* trees, with a couple perching for good scope study. An amazing long black spike of a bill for such a small tern.

SANDGROUSE, PIGEONS & DOVES:

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

Spotted Dove (*Streptopilia 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. We had terrific views of the Islands' endemic owl, the Pueo, a unique form of Short-eared Owl. One Pueo perched on a low bush just off the road, staring us down with its huge lemon-yellow eyes, before loping off into the air against a backdrop of clouds and volcanic peaks. 6-8 seen altogether.

MONARCHS, FANTAILS, and ALLIES

Elepaio (*Chasiempis sandwichensis*) – O,K,H. Elepaio forms are likely to be split by island into three separate species. Altogether, we saw: the Oahu form (*gayi*), the Kauai form (*sclateri*), and the Hawaii forms *bryani* (Puu Laau) and *ridgewayi* (at Hakalau Forest NWR). The Kauai Elepaio was especially confiding, flycatching and fluttering close to the trail.

LARKS

Sky Lark (*Alauda arvensis*) – H; seen well in the Mauna Kea area

BULBULS

Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) – O,K; common on Oahu; Roy saw two at the Lihue Airport on Kauai, which indicates this species may be spreading beyond Oahu
Red-whiskered Bulbul (*Pycnonotus jocusus*) – O; Kapiolani Park and Pia Valley

THRUSHES

White-rumped Shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*) – O,K; great views on Kauai for all
Omao [Hawaiian Thrush] (*Myadestes obscurus*) – H. An island endemic, seen well at Hakalau NWR. Its gruff “police whistle” call became a familiar sound.

BABLERS

Melodious Laughing-Thrush (*Garrulax canorus*) – O,K,H. Seen very nicely the first morning in Pia Valley. Seen again on the other two islands, a good record for such a skulky species.
Red-billed Leiothrix (*Leiothrix lutea*) – O,K,H. Nearly always a tough bird to see, we had repeated views of these little jewels in Oahu’s Pia Valley, and saw them again on the other two islands too.

WHITE-EYES

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

MIMIDS

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottus*) – K,H

MYNAS

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

BUNTINGS, SPARROWS & ALLIES

Red-crested Cardinal (*Paroaria coronata*) – O,K; a lovely exotic, first enjoyed in Kapiolani Park
Yellow-billed Cardinal (*Paroaria capitata*) – H; on the west side of the Big Island
Saffron Finch (*Sicalis flaveola*) – H; a stunning deep yellow, we saw flocks on the Big Island

TROUPIALS & ALLIES

Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) – K

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. A tough bird to find this year in the ongoing drought on the dry side of Mauna Kea. Bill L. managed to see a pair while the rest of us were walking farther along the trail

Hawaiian/Common Amakihi (*Hemignathus virens*) – H. Excellent views at Hakalau and Puu Laau; seen around Kilauea Caldera in the forest too.

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 were surprised by one in the Pia Valley, a much lower site than their typical haunts like Tantalus Loop above Honolulu. An Oahu endemic.

Anianiau (*Hemignathus parvus*) – K. Seen well in Kokee Forest, but its overall scarcity illustrates an ongoing decline of native birds in the Kauai forests.

AKIAPOLAAU (*Hemignathus munroi*) – H. In Hakalau Forest NWR, we had a wonderful study of a begging juvenile as it was fed by its parents, and as all three Aki's worked the fine branches of a koa tree. 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. Also at Hakalau Forest NWR, very good and diagnostic studies of creeping adults and juveniles. A few males singing.

AKEPA – (*Loxops coccineus*) – H. Our first views were of young males and females, but everyone was awestruck when we got a good view of several tangerine orange males (at Hakalau Forest NWR). Also heard singing at several spots in the forest.

Iiwi (*Vestiaria coccinea*) – H. We didn't have to walk very far into Hakalau Forest NWR to see our first astounding Iiwi. 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. Remarkably common in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park around Kilauea Caldera.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS

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

WAXBILLS (ESTRILDID FINCHES)

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 Kealahou Bay.

African (Warbling) Silverbill (*Lonchura catans*) – H. Another bird in scant supply probably due to the drought on the Kona side of the Big Island. Small flocks were seen briefly in flight at several locations.

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

Gold Dust Day Gecko – H; lapping up guava jelly at the Coffee Shack; nonnative

Small-eyed Skink – K; along the Kokee forest trails; nonnative

Red-eared Slider – K; in a wet area along the roadside west of Hanalei; nonnative

House Gecko – K,H; nonnative

Feral Pig – H; nonnative

Mule Deer – K; the “Black-tailed” form in Kokee forest; nonnative

Feral Goat – H; nonnative

Feral Sheep – H; nonnative

Blackburn’s Blue – H; small butterfly endemic to the Hawaiian Islands