



Newsletter 2025 - Springtime



Aloha e kākou!

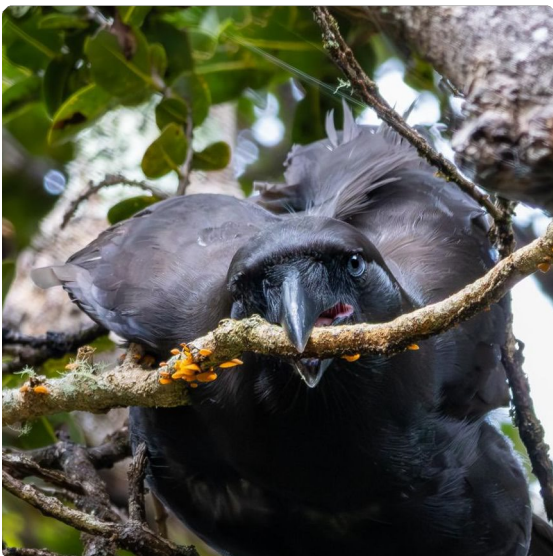
In our springtime newsletter, we've got the latest in conservation news on behalf of Maui's native forest birds. Right from the start of 2025, the dedicated team here at Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project has carried on with the impassioned work of protecting our patch of Hawai'i's heritage.

We have news from Hui Makika, Hui 'Alalā and Hui Manu Mūkīkī, in addition to some outreach updates. Plus, we have a little spotlight on our fearless Data and GIS specialist who keeps all the myriad project activities humming along.

Recent funding cuts have deeply impacted so many organizations and agencies throughout Hawai'i. Many of us across the state are committed to becoming evermore resilient, as these latest challenges have demonstrated an unexpected vulnerability to so much great work happening on behalf of our Hawai'i communities, human and otherwise.

We are so grateful to those of you that have been able to donate to Maui Forest Birds. Whatever your financial circumstance, mahalo nui loa for your continued allyship and support on behalf of Maui's native forest birds.

We couldn't do this work without you!





Hui 'Alalā news!

'Alalā are the sole surviving member of a remarkable group of five endemic corvid species once found throughout the Hawaiian Islands. Like many other native forest bird species, 'alalā are primarily threatened by non-native species, habitat loss, and introduced diseases.

The last wild 'alalā were seen in the forests of South Kona on Hawai'i Island in 2002. By that time, captive breeding to prevent total extinction had already begun. After challenges emerged with efforts to reintroduce the 'alalā back into the forests on Big Island, reintroduction efforts shifted to releasing birds within Maui Nui.

Released into a remote Maui forest in 2024, a cohort of 5 young 'alalā are steadily settling into forest life. Having reached the six month mark, these intrepid captive-reared youngsters have made impressive strides. Keeping their weights up and making longer and longer flights afield from their release site, the five are demonstrating classic wild 'alalā behaviors. Our Maui Forest Bird Recovery field team continues to provide supplemental food, do health checks, track movements and document behaviors. The 'alalā are flying free, foraging, and practicing a wide variety of vocalizations. As we carry on monitoring and documenting this positive phase in 'alalā recovery, we celebrate our partner organizations and agencies. From the careful monitoring and documentation of the last wild 'alalā on Big Island and the vital counsel of cultural practitioners to the decades of captive breeding and previous release attempts, this journey is long.

Returning to the wild is not easy and we're encouraged about this current step. We are honored to be a part of 'alalā recovery efforts on behalf of the health and heritage of Hawai'i.

The team has been monitoring the crows daily since their release and so far they are doing well. In addition to keeping their weights up, the birds are exhibiting some really positive wild behaviors. The birds make strong flights from tree to tree and can now go high above the trees or soar out in the open above the forest canopy. More good signs: all of the birds demonstrated their skills to survive inclement conditions. After some heavy storm events, they managed to find shelter in the canopy to keep themselves dry. The young cohort's social cohesion has remained stable and they cruise around comfortably together and solo. The 'ālalā team has also observed the young ones foraging on the native fruits of pukiaawe, maile, 'ōlapa, pilo, and kāwa'u and picking out invertebrates. Of course, not each member of the cohort is instantly adept in each of these areas. They are all a little different as individuals, but looking at the range of expected outcomes, we can say they are doing well.

Now what?

Moving forward, these young 'ālalā need forest time — time to experience and use their forest environment in different ways. A major goal of this pilot release is to see what these birds can do with a good chunk of time in the absence of the 'io.

Meantime, we carry on with daily monitoring. Some things we are focused on at the moment are their distribution around the release site, their proximity to one another, and their use of both the forest and the supplemental feeders/release aviary. They all started out together in captivity and their ability to fly long distances is something they've had to build up to. Now that they have been unfettered since November, they are stronger and they use more space than they did at first. This increase in range dovetails with their proximity to one another. With more space to move around in, it is now more of a choice for them to hang out together... or not. As they mature, their desire to have space or be near one another will undergo still more changes, including territoriality and, hopefully, also pair bonding. We've entered a phase of adaptive management now — from this point forward, we need to anticipate and be quick to respond to some of these changing behaviors.

Reintroductions are challenging and they often include lots of valuable lessons. We are very hopeful in the immediate term. A steady rotation of our dedicated crew continue to monitor these young ones and care for their daily needs.



Hui Makika news!

The Mosquito Suppression Effort

On the ground and in the air, the Hui Makika team is the frontline for protecting Maui's native forest birds from disease-driven extinction. Into 2025, the team continues its hard work of suppressing and monitoring the invasive southern house mosquitoes that spread disease in critical forest bird habitats.

Background notes:

Many of our native forest birds are experiencing population freefalls. The introduction of southern house mosquitoes into Hawai'i caused native birds to rapidly disappear from the warm lowlands. With no resistance to invasive mosquito-spread diseases, native forest birds have succumbed to avian malaria and pox.

To help wild native birds survive, many organizations focused their efforts on habitat preservation and restoration in high-elevation forest preserves. Windward East Maui has some of the best protected and intact high-elevation native forests in all of Hawai'i nei. And these areas were considered too cold for mosquitoes and disease. However, with rising global temperatures, mosquitoes and malaria are moving upslope, infiltrating our last forest refugia.

Our MFBRP staff and partners continue to witness the devastating, silencing impacts this change is having on Hawai'i's native forest birds, who have nowhere else to go.

Empowered to combat the mosquito threat head-on, an environmentally-friendly mosquito control technique used across the world to suppress mosquito populations for the health of human communities world is in action on Maui and Kauai. This technique, Incompatible Insect Technique (IIT), is being used by conservation teams here in Hawai'i on behalf of our endangered native forest birds. This is the first time the technique has been used for conservation.

Highlights:

After a year plus of hard work, our mosquito suppression team can report that this effort is going well! Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project has led the state in this effort — and, with assistance and training from our mosquito suppression hui, Kauai began their efforts this spring.

Because this is the first use of IIT for wildlife conservation, there has been plenty of news coverage. Weekly deployment continues of incompatible male mosquitoes, which don't bite or spread disease, with our field crew monitoring the efforts. Our dedicated team spends many days every month running monitoring traps to collect adult mosquitoes as well as their eggs and larvae. These trapping data are incorporated into a robust scientific analysis lead by MFBRP and other scientific agencies to assess how well IIT is working. Stay patient for results. Given the variability of mosquito populations across these forest habitats, longer-term data sets inform the best decision-making. For example, in some months of a given year, we catch zero mosquitoes in areas receiving IIT mosquitoes and zero mosquitoes in very similar habitats without IIT mosquitoes. And this pattern can differ the following year. It's not always easy to determine whether IIT or other environmental events are driving these naturally occurring fluctuations, especially if we look at data in small windows of time (e.g. only a few months).

Between January 2024 and March 2025, our team spent 190 days monitoring! That compliments 69 weeks of IIT deployment. Wow! And when the Makika hui isn't mosquito monitoring, they regularly help the other MFBRP hui's with bird monitoring, predator control, and outreach. Recently, some of the Makika Hui joined for the Nakula Natural Area Reserve reforestation trip (see Hui Manu Mūkīkī section). This reserve is an extra special place for Mosquito Research Coordinator, Dr. Christa Seidl, who started planting trees in Nakula in 2014.

Still impressing audiences:

The recently released film, *Vanishing Voices*, showcases the efforts of Birds, Not Mosquitoes (BNM). This multiagency partnership has been working diligently to address the honeycreeper health emergency.

Vanishing Voices aims to amplify understanding about the peril our native forest birds are facing from invasive, disease-carrying mosquitoes. The 30-minute documentary dives into nuances of the mosquito birth control effort (IIT) and highlights the ongoing work to help protect Hawai'i's native forest birds. *Vanishing Voices* features interviews with the field teams working to save the remaining birds on Maui and Kaua'i — including some members of the Maui Forest Birds team!

Watch the short documentary [here](#).





Hui Manu Mūkīkī news!

The honeycreeper team welcomed the new year by searching for kiwikiu on the windward slopes of Haleakalā. Following a few rainy days, they were able to capture and color band two kiwikiu for future tracking in these dense, wet forests.

Since February, the hui has been busy completing Hawaii Forest Bird Surveys. From the remote West Maui Mountains to the eastern slopes of Haleakalā, our intrepid field biologists are forging ahead with these super challenging and important efforts. Since the 1990's, point counts (surveys to record birds through auditory and visual detections) have aided in monitoring densities and trends of both native and non-native forest birds.

The hui, together with several partner projects, started the proceedings with surveys along the sharp ridges of Mauna Kahālāwai (West Maui Mountains). Through tough terrain, bad weather and difficult logistics, the team and partners from a number of organizations carry on conducting these nuanced surveys to understand forest bird status and distribution in Maui's remaining high elevation forests.

Hui Manu Mūkīkī is currently in the midst point counts in the upper elevations of East Maui, where our Maui endemic kiwikiu, 'ākohekohe and 'alauahio persist. Our team now conducts yearly bird surveys and monitoring along these transects to keep closer tabs on any population changes and fluctuations for these Maui endemics. Along with these surveys, the team is actively monitoring predator control grids.

In early May, the hui's bird surveys continued alongside forest restoration efforts in Nakula Natural Area Reserve. The team carried on with the work of outplanting hundreds of native shrubs, grasses and trees.

The Nakula Reserve protects alpine shrublands and a rare leeward koa -'ohi'a forest. Through our native outplanting efforts, the Maui Forest Birds hui has been diligently nurturing this region's native dry forest bird habitat.





Staff Spotlight:

Hillary Foster, Data and GIS Specialist

Hillary keeps so much of our work humming along. She works "behind the scenes" most of the time, but Hillary's efforts are vital to the Maui Forest Birds hui.

Along with managing the data for all of our teams at Maui Forest Birds, Hillary produces offline maps for our remote field navigation and creates and maintains data collection apps. Hillary also makes exceptional maps for publications and reports. She is also our 'go to' expert for all staff IT needs. And if that weren't enough, Hillary manages and maintains our electronic equipment, regularly collaborating with team leads to ensure data collection needs are met.

From honeycreeper survey efforts and 'alalā monitoring to mosquito suppression efforts, Hillary ensures fluid work flow and data accuracy throughout all our projects. She is passionate about using her expertise to support the conservation of Maui's forest birds.

Mahalo nui, Hillary!!! Your skillset is invaluable to Maui Forest Birds.



OUTREACH!

Right from the start of 2025, the Maui Forest Birds crew enjoyed venturing out into the community. Highlights were the annual Whale Tales event and the Hawai'i Endemics celebration at one of our local resorts. Members of the hui makika, hui manu mūkikī and hui 'alalā connected with visitors of all ages to share about our native forest birds and MFBRP's conservation efforts.

Enriching public understanding of Hawaii's forest ecosystems and Maui's native birds just feels good!

The winter-springtime season has provided plenty more opportunities to connect with the public. And, with such a robust crew, we've been able to cover a lot of ground.

From Prince Kuhio celebrations and Ho'omau at Maui Nui Botanical Gardens to Ag In the Classroom at Haleakalā Ranch and multiple Earth Day events, the Maui Forest Bird team has enjoyed sharing our love for Hawaii's native birds.

We were also honored to present at a Youth STEM conference and look forward to joining Kamehameha Schools for another conference presentation in June.

We're excited about making the most of these opportunities to share all the great work happening with the Maui Forest Bird Recovery team and raise awareness about native forest birds.



Maui Forest Bird
Recovery Project

From honeycreeper surveys, mosquito suppression, and 'alala monitoring to outreach and forest restoration, the Maui Forest Bird Recovery team continues our deep commitment to the health and heritage of Maui Nui.



Community



Outplanting



Restoration

We look forward to connecting with you soon again — our next newsletter will be coming your way this summer.

Until then, wishing you abundant health and peace. *Aloha.*



**Maui Forest Bird
Recovery Project**
