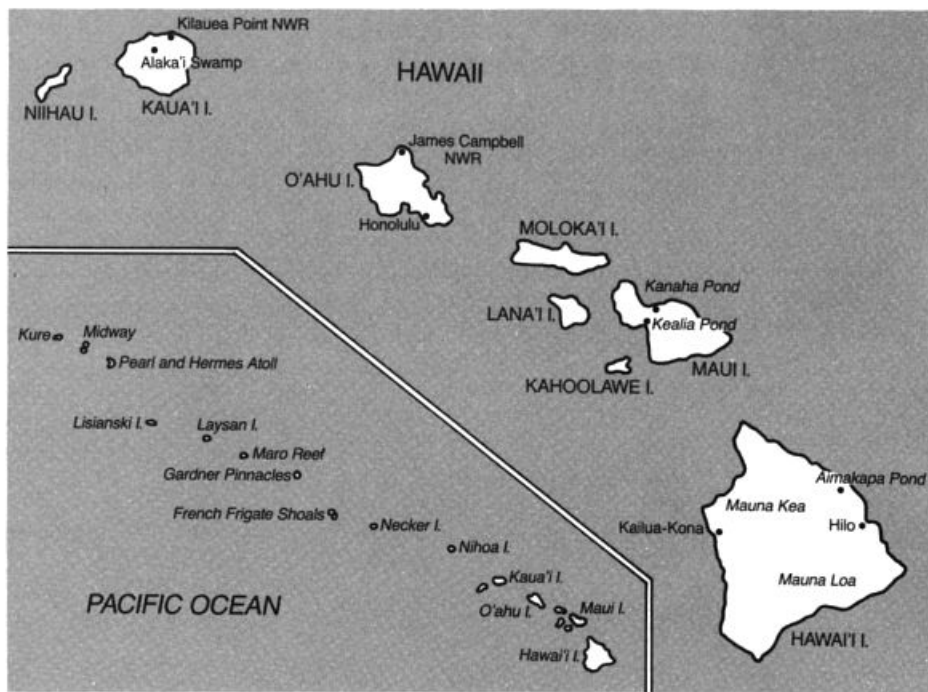


hawaiian islands region

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ROBERT L. PYLE

El Niño-related dry conditions began in late fall, and worsened during winter throughout the state and particularly on Maui and Hawai'i Islands. February rainfall was less than 50% of normal at 63 of 73 stations, with many reporting under 20%. Mountain areas were less affected, but nesting was impeded for lowland species that usually start breeding after the winter rains. Researchers and tourists now visiting Midway are continuing to find exciting birds wandering to this mid-Pacific outpost.

Abbreviations: F.F.S. (*French Frigate Shoals*); H. (*Hawai'i Island*); K. (*Kauai Island*); M. (*Maui Island*); O. (*O'ahu Island*).

GREBES THROUGH FALCONS

A Pied-billed Grebe first seen Jan. 23 at Hanalei N.W.R., K., remained at least into March (CM). This straggler could well be from North America rather than from the tiny population on Hawai'i I. The first

known record of a Pied-billed in Hawaii was at this same Hanalei site 2 decades ago. The female Short-tailed Albatross (*Endangered*, band #015) returned again this year to her same spot on Sand I., Midway, and sat on an egg without leaving for at least 60 days into January. She had sat on an egg at this site early in 1994 and again in early 1996, each time for 2 months before giving up. The eggs were all infertile. Hawaiian (Dark-rumped) Petrels (*Endangered*) were reported back at the summit of Haleakala Mt. Mar. 1. Two were seen after dark and a dozen others heard (DP). One Juan Fernandez Petrel (regular in the central Pacific, well offshore) was observed at sea 50 mi w. of Nihoa I. about Dec. 24 (TS).

An ad. male Lesser Frigatebird was reported Dec. 17–18 at Tern I., F.F.S. (TS), where one or two of this species have occurred regularly over the past 2 decades. More unusual was an observation of two ad. males Dec. 28 at Laysan I. (CD), where the species has been rarely if ever reported previously. One Great Blue Heron, a straggler



SA Red-tailed and White-tailed tropicbirds both nest commonly in Hawaii, and can be seen together most easily around Kilauea Point, Kaua'i. This season they were joined there by a **Red-billed Tropicbird**, first seen Feb. 26 (DP, DB) and enjoyed by many observers during succeeding weeks. Virtually everyone saw it with the other two species as these beautiful birds glided gracefully above and below eye-level in the updrafts at steep-sided Kilauea Point.

Where else in the United States, or anywhere for that matter, can one see all three of the world's tropicbirds, closely and well, at the same spot at the same moment, with feet planted firmly on solid ground?

Red-billed Tropicbirds have been recorded a few times at Nihoa and French Frigate Shoals in the Northwest Hawaiian Is., and in the Main Hawaiian Is. only at Kilauea Pt. The ABA logo showing a tropicbird over the ocean with its wing pointing toward Hawaii is certainly well-conceived.



Two of the world's tropicbird species nest commonly in Hawaii, but the third, Red-billed Tropicbird, is only a rare visitor. This one was present for several weeks in February and March 1998 at Kilauea Point, Kauai, Hawaii. Photograph/Dave Boynton (HRBP #1178)



Red-billed Tropicbird (above) and Red-tailed Tropicbird just off Kilauea Point, Kauai, Hawaii, on March 12, 1998. The Red-billed, a rare visitor, thrilled birders during its several-week stay, and at times all three tropicbird species could be observed together. Photograph/Jim Denny (HRBP #1179)

to Hawaii, was found at Nu'upia Ponds, O., Dec. 20 (EV). Waterfowl rarities remaining into February included seven Greater White-fronted Geese at Ki'i N.W.R., O. (MS); four Eur. Common Teal at Sand I., Midway (RLP, PP); a male Tufted Duck at Aimakapa Pond, H., to at least Feb. 16 (RD, DP); and an **Oldsquaw** (3rd Hawaii record) remaining at the Water Treatment Plant Jan. 3-Feb. 17 (RD, DP et al.).

A **Black Kite** appeared again this winter at Midway, being seen regularly by numerous observers from mid-January through the end of February (ph. PP et al.). An Osprey at Loko Waka Pond in Hilo, H., during January and an 'Io (*Endangered* Hawaiian Hawk) seen flying over the pond Feb. 16 (MO) represented both interesting records. Peregrine Falcons were reported at 3 localities on O'ahu, and at French Frigate Shoals, Midway, and Johnston Island.

COOTS THROUGH ESTRILDIDS

A bird seen well among Hawaiian Coots at Kealia Pond N.W.R. Jan. 2 was identified as

an Am. Coot (TS, good †). Hawaiian Coots (*Endangered*) at Kealia increased through the winter from 195 Dec. 1 to 295 Feb. 16 (MN), and coots concentrated on 2 artificial ponds at Kuilima Water Treatment Plant, O., increased from 175 Dec. 7 to 525 Feb. 22 (MO, RLP). A Killdeer, rarely seen in Hawaii, was studied well at Hansen Rd. Pond, M., Mar. 3 (DP). A Spotted Sandpiper, also rare in Hawaii, was observed in Pearl Harbor at Waiawa N.W.R. Jan. 14 (MS), and on the nearby shoreline of Middle Loch Feb. 22 (MO, RLP). Five Bristle-thighed Curlews, with one Whimbrel among them, were reported regularly through the winter on the dunes just outside Ki'i N.W.R., O. Unusual shorebird reports included two Ruffs at Sand I., Midway, Jan. 2 (RLP), and one there Feb. 11 & 26 (PP); a snipe at Laysan seen occasionally from November into March (CD); and a Red Phalarope at Laysan Jan. 4 (CD).

Single Laughing Gulls, occasionally two, were reported through the winter at several localities on Maui, O'ahu, and Kaua'i, and

also in the Northwest Hawaiian Is. at sea near Necker I., and at Tern I., F.F.S., Midway, and Johnston Island. One Black-legged Kittiwake was watched closely and photographed on the runway at Sand I., Midway, Jan. 16 (JAI).

A bird identified to be an **Eyebrowed Thrush** from Asia, not previously recorded in this part of the Pacific area, was first found and photographed at Sand I., Midway, Dec. 22 & 23 (JJ, GG). It was seen briefly a number of times by various observers through January and February (PP et al.). A pair of Saffron Finches in a yard in Pukalani, M., was watched daily beginning in late January as the birds built a nest in a bamboo birdhouse and finally fledged one young in early March (PN). A few Saffrons remain around Honolulu, O., and they are common on the Kona coast of Hawai'i I., but this is the first report of this species on Maui. A 2nd-year female **Snow Bunting** was observed well and photographed on the runway at Sand I., Midway, Feb. 5 (PP). Three prior records of Snow Bunting in



It may be a little hard to make this out, but the small bird flying in the foreground is a Snow Bunting, and the bigger black-and-white forms in the background are Laysan Albatrosses. No kidding. This remarkable combination was recorded at Sand Island, Midway, Hawaii, on February 5, 1998. Although a Snow Bunting in this part of the subtropical Pacific would seem very seriously out of place, Hawaii has had three previous records. Photograph/Peter Pyle (HRBP #1176) (HRBP = Hawaii Rare Bird Photograph File)

Hawaii were for Kure and F.F.S. in the 1960s and 1970s.

Orange-cheeked Waxbills continue to increase on Maui. The little group seen regularly near the headquarters building at Kealia N.W.R. had 14 adults and five

juveniles Jan. 2 (TS), and was described as a "large flock" Feb. 24 (DP). Some were also seen at Hansen Rd. Pond Mar. 3, along with Nutmeg Mannikins and about 10 Chestnut Mannikins (DP), the latter just recently being reported on Maui at this one spot.

Java Sparrows were reported this season at 2 new localities: 10–12, including some juveniles, in Hilo, H., Jan. 4 (TP) across the island from their regular haunts on the Kona coast; and four in mid-February just e. of Kaunakakai, Moloka'i (*fide* JAI), preceded on Moloka'i only by a report of two birds seen in the same yard a year earlier.

SA One of the rarest birds in the world must be the Po'ouli (critically *Endangered*), discovered in 1973 as a new genus and species endemic to wet forests high on the n. slope of Haleakala Mt. on Maui. The Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project, after several years of searching, knows now of only three individuals (being monitored regularly), although a few others conceivably might still exist in some areas that have not been readily searched (MC).

A year ago in January 1997 one of the three individuals was mist-netted and photographed, and two downy feathers were plucked and stored. A year later in January 1998, a 2nd individual was mist-netted and some breast feathers were plucked. The two sets of feathers were sent to a laboratory in England for DNA analysis for sex. The results came back: both birds were females! Accelerated effort led to mist-netting of the 3rd individual in early March. Feathers were sent, and the answer has just come back: a male! Feathers from all three individuals have been sent to another laboratory in Washington, D.C., for confirmation of the results (MC).

What happens now? The three birds currently are well separated and do not interact with each other. Should they be left alone? Or should individuals be recaptured and translocated near enough to each other that they might form a pair and perhaps, eventually, even breed? If so, then should the translocated birds be: a) completely free in a typical wet forest habitat, or b) confined in a very large pen enclosing good natural wet forest habitat, or c) confined in a captive propagation facility? In the wild, Po'ouli feed primarily on insects and small native snails gleaned from wet bark and wet moss and lichens on large tree limbs. The decisions for how best to "manage" toward recovery of this species are not simple.

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