

KAUAI & HAWAII

FEBRUARY 27 – MARCH 6, 2011

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KAUAI and HAWAII: The Garden Isle and the Big Island

February 27 – March 6, 2011

Our Kauai & Hawaii tour began on emerald-green Kauai, geologically the oldest of the main Hawaiian Islands, and continued on to Hawaii (a.k.a. The Big Island), the youngest and largest island and home to the greatest ecological diversity. During eight days of touring we visited the best birding spots on both islands, from teeming seabird cliffs to remote tracts of tropical forest.

The Hawaiian Islands are the most isolated from the continents of any island group and, like the Galapagos, represent a living study of evolution in isolation. Hawaii claims the highest proportion of unique plant and animal species on earth. The combination of distinctive endemic forest birds and stunning seabirds, plus magical scenery, mild tropical climate, and excellent dining and lodging make a trip to Kauai and Hawaii a great late winter getaway.

The north shore of Kauai and its two national wildlife refuges were the main destination on our first day. At Kilauea Point refuge, glistening white Red-tailed Tropicbirds flew near, again and again, close enough to see their wire-thin red tail streamers. White-tailed Tropicbirds winged by gracefully, showing an extraordinarily long white tail. Pairs of Laysan Albatrosses nest on the refuge, and were a continual sight gliding by the sea cliff viewpoint or landing on the grassy slope nearby. A huge, downy gray albatross chick sat in the shade of the refuge's ironwood trees. More than 1,700 Red-footed Boobies reside on a refuge hillside, and were a constant sight, flying back and forth, some carrying twigs for nest building. The same day we visited Hanalei National Wildlife Refuge, a wetland of cultivated taro fields, where we saw scores of Hawaii's state bird, the Nene, as well as such endangered native species as Hawaiian Duck and Hawaiian Coot. On another back road, we came upon a couple of Melodious Laughingthrushes (a.k.a. Hwamei), getting close views of what is often a very shy and hard to see bird.

Our second full day on Kauai was devoted to exploring the northwest portion of the island, including stops along eye-popping Waimea Canyon. Its 3,000-foot-deep chasm bordered by red basalt walls and emerald patches of foliage, the immense canyon hosts many pairs of White-tailed Tropicbirds, often seen flying along the face of the canyon's sheer walls. We stopped along the road up the canyon to watch a dazzling male Black Francolin as it crowed from atop a bare shrub just off the road. In the higher elevation forest in the northern part of Kauai, wild Red Junglefowl appeared at the edge of the road, descendants of birds first brought to the islands by Polynesians over a thousand years ago. We hiked into the native forest of koa and ohia trees, along trails lush with mosses and tree ferns, and encountered four different species of forest birds unique to Kauai: curve-billed Kauai Amakihi, family groups of Kauai Elepaio (an Old World flycatcher), chartreuse male Anianiaus, and even an Akekee—a species that has been quite scarce in recent years.

The next morning, following a flight to Kona on the Big Island, we birded the west side of the island. Just a few miles south of the airport, as the elevation began to climb, the first Hawaiian Hawk (a Big Island endemic) soared conveniently over the road for several minutes. After lunch at a café overlooking Kealahou Bay some 1,500 feet below, we stopped at a coffee roaster to taste varieties of Kona coffee, and then paid a visit to a macadamia nut farm, all the while on the lookout for new birds (such as the beautiful Lavender Waxbills seen along the roadside). The same afternoon we walked the ocean beach north of Kona, and stood side by side with green turtles as they nibbled the seaweed in the shallows. Wandering Tattlers and Yellow-billed Cardinals turned up here too.

Over the next two days on the Big Island, we went in search of endemic birds in both wet and dry tropical forests on the slopes of lofty Mauna Kea. A hike into a remote sanctuary on the island's windward side was rewarded with the best birding of the tour. Scarlet Iiwis, with scarlet plumage and bill to match, were nearly always in view. Many Iiwis were gathering nectar from the pink blossoms of akala (a native raspberry), which put them right at eye level. Akepas sang and foraged overhead in the trees, their orange feathering in vivid contrast to the dark leaves. Here too were Hawaii Elepaio, Hawaii Creeper, and Omao (a thrush)—all island endemics. In the dry forest on the lee side of Mauna Kea, we were fortunate to see several Palila, another island endemic which makes its home among the native, yellow-blossoming mamane trees. This area has been experiencing a prolonged drought, and we were grateful to locate this endangered species.

The final hotel of the tour overlooks Hilo Bay. During afternoon breaks we had a chance to reflect on the islands' wonders, while sitting on our lanais overlooking the palm-rimmed bay. During a full day at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park we explored the terrain of Kilauea, a still-active volcano which is home to this unique national park. We strolled through an ancient lava tube, watched volcanic steam emerge from a massive crater, and walked the forest trail of Kipuka Puaulu, where we finally caught up with the elusive Red-billed Leiothrix. The next morning, an excellent tour had come to an end, with many memories of these islands' natural wonders.

ITINERARY SKETCH

- Day 1 Saturday, February 27:** Arrival in Lihue, Kauai, and get-acquainted dinner at Wahoo Grill. First of three nights in Kapaa.
- Day 2 Sunday, February 28:** Before breakfast, took a brief walk near the hotel to find a White-rumped Shama. After breakfast in Kapaa, drove counter-clockwise around Kauai from Kapaa to the north shore, with stops near Kapuna Rd. and adjacent side roads before arriving at Kilauea Pt. National Wildlife Refuge just as it opened at 10 a.m. Lunch in Kilauea, then off to Hanalei National Wildlife Refuge, followed by a second visit to Kilauea Pt. Kilauea Pt. offered great views of Red-tailed Tropicbirds, Laysan Albatrosses, Red-footed Boobies, White-tailed Tropicbirds, and cavorting Humpback Whales. At Hanalei, we saw Koloa (Hawaiian Duck), Hawaiian Coot, and the Hawaiian moorhen and stilt subspecies. Dinner at Mema Thai in Kapaa. Night in Kapaa.
- Day 3 Monday, March 1:** An early morning departure took us first to breakfast in Kalaheo, then up along Waimea Canyon, where we stopped for overlooks on the canyon. Drove into Kokee Forest, stopping at roadside to bird, then took in the epic view of the Na Pali coast from Kalalau Lookout, where we also packed lunches for the trail hike. Drove jeep roads back into the native forest, then hiked along Pihea Trail. Today's bird highlights included great views of Kauai endemic bird species Anianiau, Kauai Amakihi, and Kauai Elepaio, lots of Apapanes and our first Iiwi. Saw both Black and Erckel's francolins along the canyon road. By late afternoon returned to Kokee Lodge and museum. Stopped along Waimea Canyon during descent along canyon road, then located Brown Boobies along the Kekaha shorefront. Dinner at Wranglers in Waimea before returning to Kapaa for the night.
- Day 4 Tuesday, March 2:** An early flight from Lihue, Kauai to Kona, Hawaii (via Honolulu), arriving at noon. Saw Red-vented Bulbuls at the Honolulu airport. Drove south to watch for soaring Hawaiian Hawks and for lunch overlooking the famed Kona coffee country. After lunch at Coffee Shack with a breathtaking view of Kealahou Bay, we visited a Kona coffee roaster and a macadamia nut farm. Heading north from Kona, we walked out along the beach to Aimakapa Pond, finding Green Turtles at close range as well as Wandering Tattlers. Continuing north, birded the country club grounds near Puu Anahulu, where we had good views of Gray and

Erckel's francolins, among other birds. Also today our first Saffron Finches and Yellow-billed Cardinals. Dinner at Merriman's. First of two nights in Kamuela/Waimea.

- Day 5 Wednesday, March 3:** After an early breakfast in Waimea, departed for the east side of Mauna Kea and Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge. Birded along the ranch roads enroute, and arrived at the refuge by about 9 a.m. There we birded along trails in the native forest until late afternoon, with a great deal of bird activity all day. Raucous, scarlet Iiwis were out in force, and we had excellent views of the endangered endemics Akepa (bright orange males) and Hawaii Creeper (foraging and singing overhead), as well as Hawaiian Hawk, Omao and Hawaii Elepaio. Second night in Kamuela/Waimea.
- Day 6 Thursday, March 4:** Again departed early from Waimea along the Saddle Rd., this time to bird near Puu Laau on the dry side of Mauna Kea. With amazing good fortune, we found Palila at three stops along the Puu Laau road, and everyone got good views of the three birds at the final stop. Arrived in Hilo by lunch time, picnicked at Waiakea Pond, and checked the pond for water birds. Checked in at the Hilo Hawaiian early afternoon, took an afternoon break, then met again for dinner at Café Pesto. First of two nights in Hilo.
- Day 7 Friday, March 5:** Most of a full day in and near Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, dodging rain showers in the morning. Drove the full length of the Chain of Craters Road, stopping enroute to examine a'a and pahoehoe lava fields, and then looked for Black Noddies along the seacoast lava cliffs, where they were strangely absent. After lunch at the Volcano country club, birded in Kipuka Puau (Bird Park) on the Mauna Loa Rd., getting close views of Kalij Pheasants, plus our best views of shy Red-billed Leiothrix. Next visited Jaggar Museum and Thurston Lava Tube before returning to the shoreline, where noddies were still absent. Returned to Hilo by late afternoon for farewell dinner at Café Pesto and final night at Hilo Hawaiian.
- Day 8 Saturday, March 6:** Departures from Hilo.

BIRD LIST

BIRD LIST LOCATION KEY:

H = Hawaii (the Big Island)

K = Kauai

O = Oahu

Note: species in *bold italics* are Hawaiian Islands endemic species or subspecies
species in **CAPITALIZED BOLD ITALICS** are endangered Hawaiian endemics
species in **plain bold** are otherwise especially noteworthy sightings, rare or unusual

GEESE & DUCKS

NENE (*Branta sandvicensis*) – K,H; Close views of pairs (some with goslings) on Kauai at both Kilauea Pt. NWR and Hanalei NWR. We may have seen up to 100 that day. Others on the Big Island at Hakalau Forest NWR and Waiakea Pond. Hawaii's state bird is endangered, but appears to be doing better in recent years, especially on Kauai.

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

KOLOA [HAWAIIAN DUCK] (*Anas wyvilliana*) – K; another endangered endemic, at Hanalei NWR on Kauai

Canvasback (*Aythya valisineria*) – H; a female at Waiakea Pond, quite a rarity in Hawaii

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS

California Quail (*Callipepla californica*) – H

Chukar (*Alectoris chukar*) – H; one pair along the ranch road into Hakalau NWR
Black Francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*) – K,H. Males were calling in drier regions of both islands. Saw one male crowing from a perch right near the road up Waimea Canyon.
Gray Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) – H. One at Big Island Country Club in Puu Anahulu, which pecked and scratched the ground just in front of the van.
Erckel's Francolin (*Francolinus erckelii*) – K,H. First seen along the road on Kauai as we followed the lower rim of Waimea Canyon. Ultimately saw quite a few at sites on the Big Is., such as Puu Anahulu, the Hakalau ranch road, and even along the Mauna Loa Rd. in Volcanoes Park.
Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*) - K; well established in the wild in the Kokee area
Kalij Pheasant (*Lophura leucomelana*) – H. First seen along ranch road into Hakalau, we had especially close views these handsome exotics at Kipuka Puauulu near Volcano.
Ring-necked/Common Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) – H. along road to Hakalau refuge
Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – H; first seen at the Big Is. country club, also along the Saddle Rd. and Hakalau road, including males fanning their expansive tails.

TUBENOSES

Laysan Albatross (*Diomedea immutabilis*) – K. At Kilauea Pt. National Wildlife Refuge, spectacular views of adults flying right along the edge of the lighthouse bluff at eye level. A large, gray chick was scoped on the grassy nesting area under the ironwood trees.

TROPICBIRDS, BOOBIES, and FRIGATEBIRDS

Red-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaeton rubricauda*) – K. After watching one for quite a while in front of a distant cliff, we ultimately had very close views of these elegant seabirds at Kilauea Pt.
White-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaeton lepturus*) – K,H. Good first views of these beautiful seabirds in flight at Kilauea Pt., and then others in Waimea Canyon and at Kalalau Lookout. Several were flying near Halemaumau Crater in Volcanoes Park, despite the crater's ongoing spewing of volcanic gases.
Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*) - K. Very close views of boobies flying by at Kilauea Pt., some carrying nest material; the adjacent hillside hosts more than 1700 of the white boobies.
Brown Booby (*Sula sula*) – K; along the coast at Kekaha

HERONS

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) – K,H; introduced to the islands
Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – K,H; arrived on their own to the islands

EAGLES, HAWKS & allies

IO [HAWAIIAN HAWK] (*Buteo solitarius*) – H. During the drive south toward Captain Cook for lunch, the first hawk we saw conveniently soared overhead for minutes. A dark morph hawk at Hakalau refuge perched in a tree above our picnic spot.

MOORHENS & COOTS

COMMON MOORHEN [Hawaiian subspecies] (*Gallinula chloropsis sandvicensis*) – K; right at the roadside in the taro fields of Hanalei NWR

HAWAIIAN COOT (*Fulica alai*) – K,H; at Hanalei NWR, Aimakapa Pond, and Big Island Country Club

SHOREBIRDS

Pacific Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis pacifica*) – K,H. Widespread on both islands, with some showing a few dark feathers of breeding plumage.

BLACK-NECKED STILT [Hawaiian subspecies] (*Himantopus mexicanus knudseni*) – K,H. A darker necked subspecies of this widespread stilt species, we had our first views of them at Hanalei NWR.

Wandering Tattler (*Heteroscelus incanus*) – H; wintering migrants along the shore near Aimakapa Pond north of Kona; at least one behind the Hilo Hawaiian Hotel

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) – H; north of Kona and near the hotel in Hilo

GULLS, & TERNS

Laughing Gull (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – H. One winter plumage bird at Waiakea Pond. Any gull is rare in the Hawaiian Islands, although Laughing Gull is one of the most regular.

PIGEONS & DOVES

Rock Dove (*Columba livia*) – K,H

Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*) – K,H

Zebra Dove (*Geopelia striata*) – K,H

MONARCHS, FANTAILS, and allies

Hawaii Elepaio (*Chasiempis sandwichensis*) – H. Until earlier in 2010, the three elepaio species were treated as subspecies. DNA and other research now show that the species on each island are distinct. We saw Hawaii Elepaio (*ridgewayi* subspecies) at Hakalau refuge and *bryani* while searching for Palila on Mauna Kea's dry side.

Kauai Elepaio (*Chasiempis sclateri*) – K. The Kauai Elepaios seemed especially confiding, flitting close to the trail and group. Here the adults were mostly gray, the immatures mostly rust in color.

LARKS

Sky Lark (*Alauda arvensis*) – H; first seen near Waimea, common along Saddle Rd.

BULBULS

Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) – O; at the airport in Honolulu

OLD WORLD WARBLERS

Japanese Bush-Warbler (*Cettia diphone*) – K; heard at Hanalei refuge and along Waimea Canyon. Despite repeated efforts to elicit a view, we never laid eyes on one.

THRUSHES and BABBLERS

White-rumped Shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*) – K; a beautiful, introduced thrush

Omao [Hawaiian Thrush] (*Myadestes obscurus*) - H; great views at Hakalau Forest NWR and heard in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park

Melodious Laughingthrush (*Garrulax canorus*) – K,H; excellent views of a couple along the shrubby roadside a few miles east of Kilauea; also at Bird Park in Volcanoes Park
Red-billed Leiothrix (*Leiothrix lutea*) - H; a real skulker and a real beauty, seen by some at Hakalau and ultimately by all at Bird Park (Kipuka Puauulu)

WHITE-EYES

Japanese White-eye (*Zosterops japonicus*) – K,H; widespread, in most habitats

MIMIDS

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) – K.

MYNAS

Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) – K,H; widespread, especially around settled areas

EMBERIZIDS

Saffron Finch (*Sicalis flaveola*) - H; a beautiful yellow, introduced finch, now expanding widely on the Big Island

Red-crested Cardinal (*Paroaria coronata*) – K; a lovely introduced bird

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

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

BLACKBIRDS AND ALLIES

Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) - K; on Kauai's north side

INTRODUCED CARDUELINE FINCHES

House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) – K,H; males tending toward orange to yellow-orange

Yellow-fronted Canary (*Serinus mozambicus*) – H; a pretty exotic from Africa, seen near Aimakapa Pond and at Hakalau refuge

HAWAIIAN HONEYCREEPERS and FINCHES (DREPANIDINES)

PALILA (*Loxoides bailleui*) - H. We were fortunate both that access to this bird's range had recently reopened after a long drought, and that they seemed to be moving down in elevation so that we saw them at three different spots. An endangered, Big Island endemic finch limited to a small area of dry forest on the west side of Mauna Kea.

Hawaii (Common) Amakihi (*Hemignathus virens*) – H. The more common of the little yellow-green native birds seen on the Big Island, where we had many views of them in the Hakalau rainforest as well as in the dry mamane/naio forest on the lee side of Mauna Kea.

Kauai Amakihi (*Hemignathus stejnegeri*) – K. Our first roadside stop in Kokee Forest provided good views of this island endemic, and we later saw other along Alakai Trail.

Its long, decurved bill gave it quite a different look from the Hawaii Amakihi, seen later.

Anianiau (*Hemignathus parvus*) - K; Good view of a chartreuse males along the Pihea boardwalk, well into the forest; altogether, very scarce now

HAWAII CREEPER (*Oreomystis mana*) - H. Another endangered Big Island endemic, we had some excellent views of a couple creeping along branches at Hakalau refuge.

AKEKEE (*Loxops caeruleirostris*) – K. One along the Alakai Trail, which we followed overhead as it foraged in the top of an ohia. We were very fortunate to see this species, which has declined sharply in recent years and has been very hard to find on the Hawaii tours for about five years.

AKEPA (*Loxops coccineus*) - H. Superb views of orange males, beginning fairly early during the walk down into Hakalau refuge. One of the trip favorites. Another endangered Big Island endemic.

Iwi (*Vestiaria coccinea*) – H. Another group favorite among the Hawaiian endemics seen, we watched them throughout the day at Hakalau Forest NWR, especially as the visited raspberry blossoms at eye level. Their brilliant red plumage and long, decurved red bills made them appear truly exotic, and were complemented by an wide assortment of squeaky and reedy vocalizations.

Apapane (*Himatione sanguinea*) - K,H. The most prevalent and widespread of all the Hawaiian endemic forests, this red honeycreeper had a gentle song that became very familiar during our time in the native forest.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) – K,H

ESTRILDID FINCHES

Lavender Waxbill (*Estrilda caerulescens*) – H; Karen spotted a flock of ten in a Kealakekua roadside patch of tall grass

Red Avadavat (*Amandava amandava*) – K; briefly below a perched Black Francolin along lower Waimea Canyon

African Silverbill (*Lonchura/Euodice cantans*) – two at Big Is. Country Club

Nutmeg Mannikin (*Lonchura punctulata*) - K,H; close views of their minutely scaled underparts
Chestnut Munia/Mannikin (*Lonchura malacca*) - K

MAMMALS & HERPS

Hawaiian Monk Seal (*Monachus schauinslandi*) – K; basking at Kilauea Pt. NWR

Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) – K; quite a few seen from Kilauea refuge

Spinner Dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*) – K; distantly, from Kilauea refuge

Small Indian Mongoose (*Herpestes auropunctatus*) – H

Mouflon (*Ovis aries orientalis*) – H; on a hillside on the Saddle Rd.

Gold Dust Day Gecko (*Phelsuma laticauda*) - H; the rainbow-colored gecko at the Coffee Shack; an introduced species from Madagascar

Knight Anole (*Anolis equestris*) – H; at the Kona coffee tasting room

Metallic Skink (*Lampropholis delicata*) – K; along the boardwalk trail in Kokee Forest

Common Coqui (*Eleutherodactylus coqui*) – frog heard calling “ko – kee” around Hilo

Atmospheric Phenomena

On May 3, we saw from about 7000 ft. on Mauna Kea, a very bright iridescent cloud, just below the sun. Here’s a bit more about that phenomenon:

Cloud iridescence (from R. Greenler's *Rainbows, Halos, and Glories*, Cambridge U. Press, 1980

Sometimes you can see that certain parts of clouds show iridescent colors. In most cases this iridescence appears in clouds which form rapidly (e.g. altocumulus lenticularis). Especially the rims of these clouds have purple red, blue and green colors. This phenomenon is closely related to the coronae. Here the colors are also caused by the diffraction of light. The water droplets that cause the iridescence are very small. Small droplets generate very big coronae with wide rings of the same color. This is the reason why great parts of the cloud have the same color. The other colors in the iridescent cloud are less due to the changing distance from the sun, but to different sizes of the droplets. Different droplet sizes generate different coronae, what makes the color differ despite the equal distance from the sun.

As the results of continuous observations of atmospheric phenomena show, about 12% of the cloud iridescence observed were visible in cirrocumulus clouds. The greatest part of these clouds consists of ice crystals while freezing water droplets make only a small part of them. Even in cirrocumulus clouds iridescence is often observed more than 30° away from the sun, a fact that almost excludes the diffraction of light as a reason for the formation of the iridescence. So the latest theories assume that the colors are caused by interfering rays of light being reflected from the front or rear side of very thin plate shaped ice crystals or by interfering rays a part of which directly passes the cloud layer while the other rays are reflected once or several times inside the cloud layer.