

A Great Year For Endangered Hawaiian Seabirds

39 Chicks Fledge from Protected Nihoku Site in 2018

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A nearly fledged Ua'u (Hawaiian Petrel) chick, in care at a translocation project that is part of a larger effort to save this Endangered species. Photo by Leilani Fowlke (Pacific Rim Conservation).

(Kilauea, Kaua'i, Hawai'i, December 21, 2018) In 2018, conservation partners again provided a new home, safe from invasive predators, for some of Hawai'i's most imperiled seabirds. A total of 39 chicks, including 20 Endangered Ua'u ([Hawaiian Petrel](#)) and 19 Threatened 'A'o ([Newell's Shearwater](#)), were moved from colonies in the mountains to the translocation site this past year, called Nihoku, at Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge. In this location, they are protected by a predator-proof fence surrounding the Nihoku restoration site.

Over the course of several weeks, the chicks are fed and cared for by a dedicated team of biologists and volunteers until they fledge – finish molting into adult plumage and fly off. Over the last four years, 112 chicks have successfully fledged from the site. The chicks will spend a few years at sea before returning to the exact area where they were raised, hopefully establishing a new seabird colony at Nihoku.



Some of the mountainous habitat the seabirds nest in – though rugged, cats, rats and pigs are still present and pose a threat to the birds. Photo credit: Hannah Nevins/ABC

All of the translocated chicks were collected from colonies located in Kaua'i's rugged, mountainous interior, where the birds are under threat from introduced predators, including feral cats, rats, and pigs, as well as loss of breeding habitat. These dangers, coupled with collisions with power lines and attraction to artificial lights, have dramatically reduced populations of the Ua'u and 'A'o on Kaua'i. The effort to create a new, fully protected colony of these birds at Nihoku is part of a larger effort to protect the two species and help their populations recover.

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The future site of a new seabird colony at Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge. Photo credit: Andre Raine/KESRP

The 7.8-acre translocation site is protected within a predator-proof fence. Made with very small, woven, stainless steel mesh, buried three feet underground, and with an upper hood that prevents the incursion of predators, this is one of the best tools available for conservation of seabird colonies. Such fences now are more frequently used as a hedge against introduced predators plaguing native birds, plants, and even small endangered tree snails in Hawai'i.

The project has not been without its challenges. This year a record-breaking rain event in mid-April swept across the island, flooding the nearby Hanalei Valley and part of the refuge. An estimated 49.6 inches of rain fell in 24 hours, nearly blowing out a drainage culvert under the protective predator-proof fence. In addition, Hurricane Lane drove in more rains in mid-August.



Moving the chicks into their new home, safe from invasive predators. Photo credit: Hannah Nevins/ABC

“We experienced a difficult year with many close-calls due to unanticipated weather events, but despite these challenges, we are very pleased to have completed another successful year of this important seabird recovery project,” said Heather Tonneson, Refuge Complex Manager at the Kaua‘i National Wildlife Refuge Complex.”

Lindsay Young, Executive Director for Pacific Rim Conservation, who led the project to build the fence, attributes part of the success to good design: “The record rainfall this year had minimal impacts on the fence as a result of design features that allowed water to exit the fenced area.” All partners are grateful for the help of dedicated volunteers, who helped to keep debris away from the drainage culverts, keeping Nihoku predator free.

Other challenges came from the birds themselves. “Each chick has its own personality, and more often than not, they are just plain feisty, which makes daily care a challenge,” says Outreach Coordinator for Pacific Rim Conservation Leilani Fowlke.

Another potential stumbling block: traveling in and out of the rugged, mist-shrouded mountains to recover chicks for translocation and bring them to Nihoku for care until they fledge. André Raine, Project Lead for the Kaua’i Endangered Seabird Recovery Project, explained: “After monitoring the chicks in all seasons, we move them during a narrow window, a few weeks before fledging. Chicks are transferred from underground nests to a special transport box, and delivered via a short helicopter ride to their new home at Nihoku. The weather is always an unpredictable factor each year, as it is often raining and misty in their mountain homes, but despite this, the translocations all went well this year!”



By December 2018, all 19 Newell's Shearwater chicks and 19 of the 20 Hawaiian Petrel chicks had fledged. “We are doing our best to give them a good start here so they are best prepared to thrive once they fly out to sea,” says Hannah Nevins, American Bird Conservancy's Seabird Program Director. “The healthier they are when they depart their nest to fly out to sea, the better the chances they will return to breed.”

These seabirds spend their first four to five years at sea and the partners are anxiously waiting for the first translocated birds to return to the site to breed — the ultimate measure of success for the project.



Partners celebrating the successful translocation work. Photo credit: Andre Raine/KESRP

The effort to establish this new colony is a collaboration among the Kaua'i Endangered Seabird Recovery Project (KESRP), Pacific Rim Conservation (PRC), American Bird Conservancy (ABC), the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources'

Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). KESRP is a DOFAW/Pacific Cooperative Studies Unit project. Other partners also provided much-needed assistance for the project. The Kaua'i Island Utility Cooperative provided critical support for predator control in collaboration with DOFAW at montane nesting areas within the Hono O Na Pali Natural Area Reserve and the National Tropical Botanical Garden (NTBG) at Upper Limahuli Preserve. NTBG also conducted vegetation restoration at Nihokū. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) provided critical funding support. The Kaua'i DOFAW Natural Area Reserve team also provided on-the-ground support.

[Pacific Rim Conservation](#) (PRC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to studying and conserving the biota of the Pacific region. PRC provides biological research and management services to government agencies, non-profit organizations, landowners, and other groups throughout the Hawaiian Islands and the Pacific region. PRC's goal is to maintain and restore native species and ecosystems through habitat protection and management, threat control, public education, and scientific research to develop and improve conservation methods.

The mission of DLNR's [Division of Forestry and Wildlife](#)(DOFAW) is to responsibly manage and protect watersheds, native ecosystems, and cultural resources and provide outdoor recreation and sustainable forest products opportunities, while facilitating partnerships, community involvement, and education. Malama i ka 'aina.

The [Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources](#) (DLNR) mission is to enhance, protect, conserve, and manage Hawaii's unique and limited natural, cultural, and historic resources held in public trust for current and future generations of the people of

Hawaii nei, and its visitors, in partnership with others from the public and private sectors.

The [Kaua'i Endangered Seabird Recovery Project](#) is a DOFAW project, administered through the Pacific Cooperative Studies Unit of the University of Hawai'i. The project focuses primarily on Kaua'i's three endangered seabirds— Newell's Shearwater, Hawaiian Petrel, and Band-rumped Storm-Petrel. KESRP identifies the breeding distribution of these rare and enigmatic seabirds, monitors their breeding colonies, undertakes research projects to better understand their life histories and the various threats that they face, and works with partners to ensure their long-term conservation.

The [Kīlauea Point National Wildlife Refuge](#) was established in 1985 to preserve and enhance migratory bird nesting colonies, federally listed species, and native coastal strand, riparian, and aquatic biological diversity, as well as to support incidental fish and wildlife-oriented recreation. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

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American Bird Conservancy is a non-profit organization dedicated to conserving birds and their habitats throughout the Americas. With an emphasis on achieving results and working in partnership, we take on the greatest problems facing birds today, innovating and building on rapid advancements in science to halt extinctions, protect habitats, eliminate threats, and build capacity

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