



*Bringing back the birds*

May 26, 2017

The Honorable Mazie Hirono  
The Honorable Brian Schatz  
The Honorable Colleen Hanabusa  
The Honorable Tulsi Gabbard

Dear Senator Hirono, Senator Schatz, Representative Hanabusa, and Representative Gabbard,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and agencies, we ask that Congress address the bird extinction crisis in Hawai'i by supporting the creation of a bird conservation fund of \$20 million over the next four years. These resources are urgently needed to maintain and expand successful recovery efforts for endangered Hawaiian bird species, and to meet the growing threat of invasive species on the Islands.

Hawai'i boasts an incredible diversity of endemic birds and plants, with 90% of its native species being found nowhere else. It has become known as the endangered species capital of the world, as well as the bird extinction capital of the world. Since humans arrived, over 91 Hawaiian bird species have become extinct. More than one-third of all bird species listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act are native to Hawai'i. Close to 40% of all listed endangered plant taxa in the United States can be found only in Hawai'i.

Preventing further extinctions of Hawai'i's unique birds and plants can be achieved with perseverance, dedication, and additional resources. It will require coordinated actions among conservationists in the public and private sectors, and at the local, state, and national levels. As a small isolated state, Hawai'i does not have the resources to safeguard the numerous endangered, endemic species which are invaluable components of national and international biodiversity. It will require a dramatic increase in the funding to support and expand the current network of committed conservation practitioners working on the ground in Hawai'i.

A diverse team of national and state partners is seeking a pledge from the United States government for \$20 million over four years to implement a series of high impact projects to make significant strides in stemming the tide of extinction in Hawai'i. Here is a brief list of some of the problem areas and needed conservation activities:

*Taking back native forests from non-native ungulates and exotic plants.*

- Complete a series of strategic ungulate-proof fences in Kaua'i's rugged Alaka'i Swamp and remove non-native pigs to allow the restoration of damaged forest vegetation and stem the spread of avian malaria.
- Eradicate non-native mouflon and mouflon-sheep hybrids from Palila critical habitat on Mauna Kea. The state has made great progress, but needs support to complete the final push. Removal of these animals is key to restoring the mountain's māmane forests for birds and native plants.
- Construct 30 miles of new ungulate fence and remove pigs and other ungulates from 6,000 acres of prime habitat for endangered native birds, plants, and other endemic organisms at Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge on Hawai'i Island.

- Expand programs to control and eradicate invasive exotic plants such as Australian tree ferns and strawberry guava from native forests on all islands

*Stopping Non-native Avian Diseases.*

- Begin implementation of techniques to reduce and eliminate non-native mosquitos from the Hawaiian Island to save Hawaiian forest birds from the next wave of extinctions as climate change spreads mosquitos and with them avian malaria and avian pox virus to higher elevations.

*Stamping out non-native mammalian predators.*

- Construct state-of-the-art predator proof fences at National Wildlife Refuges on Kaua'i, O'ahu, and Maui to create breeding habitat free of non-native feral cats, mongooses, and rats for endangered Hawaiian waterbirds.
- Eradicate non-native feral cats and Polynesian rats from Kaho'olawe (117 sq. km, the largest uninhabited island in the main Hawaiian Islands) to set the stage for a flagship environmental restoration project to benefit native land and sea birds and native plants.

*Stop the flow of invasive non-native species among islands and from other sites to Hawai'i.*

- Improve biosecurity measures to protect each of the main Hawaiian Islands from the spread of invasive, exotic species both within the islands and from others sites into the state through creation and expansion of programs to ensure complete cargo and passenger screening (air and sea). Support and fund the recently released Hawai'i Interagency Biosecurity Plan, 2017-2027.
- Establish biosecurity programs to protect the offshore islets of O'ahu, Maui, and Moloka'i from accidental introductions of invasive exotic species (e.g., ants, mice, rats). Conduct targeted eradication programs where needed.

Thank you for considering this request, and for your support for protecting and restoring bird populations on Hawai'i.

Sincerely,

Chris Farmer, Hawai'i Program Director  
American Bird Conservancy

Marjorie Ziegler, Executive Director  
Conservation Council for Hawai'i

Owen S. Moe, President  
Garden Island Resource Conservation & Development, Inc.

Hob Osterland  
Kauai Albatross Network

Hanna Mounce, Executive Director  
Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project

Chauncey Asing, Project Coordinator  
Mauna Kea Forest Restoration Project