

Trip Report — Hawaii I 2026

March 12-20, 2026 with Sam Wilson & Mandy Talpas



Seeing the beautiful Laysan Albatross is one of the highlights of our time on Kaua'i. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

What is it like to go bird watching during a one-in-twenty-year tropical storm? Had we known the actual intensity of the storm and the extent of the damage it wrought across the Hawaiian Islands before our departure, it would have been an easy decision to cancel. Weather predictions varied, but high winds and heavy rain are nothing new to the islands. There was considerable uncertainty in the forecast, and those living on the islands were accustomed to these frequent storm events, known locally as a Kona Low. Unfortunately, this storm brought power outages, extremely high winds, catastrophic flooding, infrastructure damage, downed trees across highways, and airline delays that persisted well into the following week. Despite these obstacles—especially during the first few days—we always had good meals,

comfortable accommodations (with power!), and we still managed to track down some excellent birds.



Another seabird highlight is the spectacular White-tailed Tropicbird, on display at Kilauea Point. Photo by participant Holly Salvato.

Oahu received an incredible 18 inches of rain during our visit, much of it overnight, and yet we still managed to see a few Oahu Amakihi battling the wind on the first day in the foothills. White Tern chicks clung to their precarious, bare-branch perches in the blowing winds in downtown Honolulu. After encountering traffic and flooding on the north shore we heeded warnings about worsening conditions and turned around to find some reprieve back in Honolulu. On our second full day, the sky cleared for a few magical hours, allowing us to find the globally rare Bristle-thighed Curlew on a golf course on the North Shore. This was a welcome victory, and although we missed Oahu Elepaio due to flooding, we were able to move on to Kaua'i.



Among Hawaii's native forest birds, the Hawaii Elepaio is one of the most sprightly and curious. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

Kaua'i presented its own set of challenges from accidents and flood damage, but once again we persevered, making it to the lookout at Kilauea Point in time to see Red-tailed Tropicbirds before they retired for the day. We also checked off Laysan Albatross, Red-footed Booby, Brown Booby, and several others. Our first looks at Nene (Hawaiian Goose) were another highlight, as was a special view of nesting albatross.

Waimea Canyon Road is world-famous for its views into the "Grand Canyon of the Pacific," carved over millions of years by heavy rainfall eroding the volcanic island's mountains. That same intense rainfall had a more immediate effect on our ability to reach the top of the road, though we eventually made our way up to search for rare forest birds. Unfortunately, the highland forest birds of Kaua'i have been devastated by invasive species and avian malaria, making our visit to Koke'e all the more sobering. The past two years in particular have been especially hard on Kaua'i's forest birds, and our only

targets were Kauai Elepaio and Apapane. In the past, Anianiau was relatively common and Kauai Amakihi was readily seen. The Amakihi is no longer found within the state park and is vanishing quickly from its core range in the remote Alaka'i Swamp. Anianiau, once one of the most common honeycreepers in the highlands, has been reduced to a single known pair remaining in Koke'e State Park—which we did not see. The culprit is avian malaria, and the accelerating decline is likely due to a warming climate that allows mosquitoes to reach higher into the mountains, leaving the birds with nowhere left to retreat.

After the difficulties on Kaua'i, we moved on to a more encouraging situation on Hawaii's Big Island. Our first stop was the Palila Discovery Trail, where we expected a similar story with declining populations of the grosbeak-like honeycreeper called Palila. Hawaii Amakihi and Hawaii Elepaio still hold on strongly in the reserve, though the Palila itself appeared to be nearly, if not entirely, gone from the preserve based on the lack of sightings. We quickly found our target Amakihi and Elepaio while finally enjoying some comfortable weather! I was awestruck when, during a group break, I looked up to spot what appeared to be a large finch perched atop a māmane tree (a native Hawaiian bush). One look through binoculars confirmed it: a very welcome Palila sighting! Two were present that day, and on the following tour we saw five in the preserve—an encouraging sign after witnessing the decline of native birds firsthand on the other islands. We continued through nearby parks and preserves in search of non-native but ABA-countable specialties, and were fortunate to see a flock of nine Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse fly overhead, along with Gray Francolin, Eurasian Skylark, and Rosy-faced Lovebird.



Once in awhile we do hit the beaches! These resting Green Sea Turtles are a mainstay on parts of Kaua'i. Photo by participant Andrew Steinmann.

We spent our last day driving up the slopes of Mauna Kea, an extinct volcano, to the remarkable Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge, which requires special vehicles and permits for access. It was a phenomenal day of birding, and we tracked down the "big three" scarcities: Akepa, Akiapola'au, and Hawaii Creeper. We also had our first 'I'iwi sightings of the trip—a classic native Hawaiian bird now reachable by birdwatchers only on this island—with many excellent views of this strikingly beautiful species. The drive back down took us through thick fog, but we still managed a quick look at Pueo (Hawaiian Short-eared Owl) before enjoying a nice departing meal in the small town of Kona.



On one of our excursions, we round the island of Oahu to find Bristle-thighed Curlew, a globally scarce bird that only nests in Western Alaska. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

Mandy and I sincerely thank all participants who took the rain, wind, flight delays, and road challenges in stride. Working closely with our office staff, we made the unworkable work, and were able to check off the majority of the native birds—and quite a few non-natives—we had hoped to see, along with a few pleasant surprises. Perhaps there was a little adventure and glimmer of hope for the birds to be found in the aftermath of a 20-year storm after all. Here's to seeing you again next time under blue skies, and once more hearing the rich warble of a Palila on the slopes of Mauna Kea.



Blue-billed White-Tern is doing surprisingly well, nesting in urban haunts of downtown Honolulu! Photo by participant Andrew Steinmann.

Mammal list:

Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

Small Indian Mongoose (*Urva auropunctata*)

Hawaiian Monk Seal (*Neomonachus schauinslandi*)

Eurasian Wild Pig (*Sus scrofa*)

Herps:

Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*)

Gold Dust Day Gecko (*Phelsuma laticauda*)

Green Anole (*Anolis carolinensis*)

Brown Anole (*Anolis sagrei*)

Coqui (*Eleutherodactylus coqui*)
Jackson's Chamaleon (*Trioceros jacksonii*)

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/573030>

You can download a combined PDF of this page and the eBird report at this link: <https://fieldguides.com/triplists/hai26aTRIPLIST.pdf>

-- Sam

Field Guides Birding Tours—Hawaii, 2026 (with Sam Wilson and Mandy Talpas)



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 **Sam Wilson**



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 **74**

Species Observed

 **30**

Checklists

 **13**

Species with Photos

LIFERS  17  8 

Species Observed

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3	Snow Goose <i>Anser caerulescens</i>	 1
329	Hawaiian Goose <i>Branta sandvicensis</i>	 1  4
12	Hawaiian Duck <i>Anas wyvilliana</i> 	 1  1
2	California Quail <i>Callipepla californica</i> *	 1
1	Wild Turkey <i>Meleagris gallopavo</i> *	 1
1	Ring-necked Pheasant <i>Phasianus colchicus</i> *	 1
5	Kalij Pheasant <i>Lophura leucomelanos</i> * 	 3
3	Indian Peafowl <i>Pavo cristatus</i> *	 1
12	Red Junglefowl <i>Gallus gallus</i> *	 2

2	Gray Francolin	<i>Ortygornis pondicerianus</i>	*	✓	📷	▶	📷 1	📊 1
7	Black Francolin	<i>Francolinus francolinus</i>	*	✓		▶	📊 3	
2	Chukar	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>	*	✓		▶	📊 1	
10	Erckel's Spurfowl	<i>Pternistis erckelii</i>	*			▶	📊 6	
3	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	*			▶	📊 1	
21	Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>	*			▶	📊 12	
87	Zebra Dove	<i>Geopelia striata</i>	*			▶	📊 12	
4	Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	*			▶	📊 1	
11	Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles exustus</i>	*	✓	📷	▶	📷 3	📊 1
4	Common Gallinule	<i>Gallinula galeata</i>				▶	📊 2	
8	Hawaiian Coot	<i>Fulica alai</i>				▶	📊 1	
6	Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>				▶	📊 3	
58	Pacific Golden-Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>				▶	📊 8	
4	Bristle-thighed Curlew	<i>Numenius tahitiensis</i>				▶	📷 4	📊 1
5	Wandering Tattler	<i>Tringa incana</i>				▶	📷 1	📊 2
4	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>				▶	📊 2	
16	Blue-billed White-Tern	<i>Gygis candida</i>			📷	▶	📷 1	📊 2
6	White-tailed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon lepturus</i>				▶	📊 3	
1	Red-tailed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon rubricauda</i>				▶	📊 1	
8	Laysan Albatross	<i>Phoebastria immutabilis</i>				▶	📷 3	📊 2

3	Wedge-tailed Shearwater	<i>Ardena pacifica</i>	▶  2
11	Great Frigatebird	<i>Fregata minor</i>	▶  2
301	Red-footed Booby	<i>Sula sula</i>	▶  1  2
18	Brown Booby	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	▶  1
6	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	▶  3
18	Western Cattle-Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i> *	▶  5
2	Hawaiian Hawk	<i>Buteo solitarius</i> ✓	▶  2
1	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	▶  1
11	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i> *	▶  4
10	Hawaii Elepaio	<i>Chasiempis sandwichensis</i> ✓ 	▶  2  2
2	Kauai Elepaio	<i>Chasiempis sclateri</i>	▶  1
10	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i> *	▶  3
2	Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i> *	▶  2
1	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i> *	▶  1
14	Japanese Bush Warbler	<i>Horornis diphone</i> *	▶  5
61	Warbling White-eye	<i>Zosterops japonicus</i> *	▶  13
12	Red-billed Leiothrix	<i>Leiothrix lutea</i> *	▶  5
11	Chinese Hwamei	<i>Garrulax canorus</i> *	▶  3
4	Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush	<i>Pterorhinus pectoralis</i> * ✓	▶  1
123	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i> *	▶  9

6	Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	*	▶  6
4	Omao	<i>Myadestes obscurus</i>	✓	▶  1
19	White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>	*	▶  4
38	African Silverbill	<i>Euodice cantans</i>	*	▶  3
41	Java Sparrow	<i>Padda oryzivora</i>	* ✓	▶  3
22	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	*	▶  2
4	Chestnut Munia	<i>Lonchura atricapilla</i>	*	▶  2
108	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>	*	▶  5
25	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	*	▶  5
1	Palila	<i>Loxioides bailleui</i>	✓	▶  1
16	Apapane	<i>Himatione sanguinea</i>		▶  2
13	Iiwi	<i>Drepanis coccinea</i>	📷	▶  1  1
2	Akiapolaau	<i>Hemignathus wilsoni</i>	✓ 📷	▶  1  1
31	Hawaii Amakihi	<i>Chlorodrepanis virens</i>	✓	▶  2
2	Oahu Amakihi	<i>Chlorodrepanis flava</i>		▶  1
6	Hawaii Creeper	<i>Loxops mana</i>	✓ 📷	▶  1  1
6	Hawaii Akepa	<i>Loxops coccineus</i>	✓	▶  1
9	House Finch	<i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>	*	▶  5
6	Yellow-fronted Canary	<i>Crithagra mozambica</i>	* ✓	▶  3
2	Western Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>	*	▶  2

13 **Northern Cardinal** *Cardinalis cardinalis* * ▶ 7

39 **Red-crested Cardinal** *Paroaria coronata* * ▶ 3

2 **Yellow-billed Cardinal** *Paroaria capitata* * ▶ 1

65 **Saffron Finch** *Sicalis flaveola* * ▶ 4

EXOTIC: PROVISIONAL

11 **Rosy-faced Lovebird** *Agapornis roseicollis* * ✓ ▶ 2

EXOTIC: ESCAPEE

36 **Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* * ▶ 3