Trip Report — Hawaii II 2026

March 23-31, 2026 with Sam Wilson & Mandy Talpas



Palila is a beautiful rare native Hawaiian Honeycreeper that we had the great fortune to find and spend time with. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

The Hawaiian Islands are known by many as a tropical paradise, but we knew better than to expect perfect weather and slow-paced island time. In fact, my local co-guide Mandy Talpas and I had just wrapped up the Hawaii I tour, leading the trip through the most intense Kona storm in 20 years, complete with hurricane-force winds, historic flooding, flight delays, and all manner of disruptions. Though we did face some logistical challenges on this trip, it felt like a light Hawaiian breeze compared to the cyclone of obstacles we encountered on our last trip. The weather cooperated, and the birding was a delight!



We seek out close encounters with Laysan Albatross, and this trip was no exception! Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

On day one, we set out from the city and quickly found our first target in the foothills above Honolulu: the endearing Oʻahu Amakihi, foraging among native flowering trees. Back in the urban oasis of Honolulu, Blue-billed White Terns were regrouping in the trees above city streets. Some had unfortunately lost their young during the storm, but we saw several chicks that had weathered it successfully, clinging for dear life to bare limbs. Another highlight came from a tip by a biologist friend of Mandy's: a Red-tailed Tropicbird nest tucked beneath a rock on a cliff just off the ring highway. Point-blank views of this cliff nester was a thrill. Later in the day, we stopped by Pearl Harbor National Wildlife Refuge for wetland birds and were lucky to refind a rare Ruff from the marsh platform!



Ice cream was not neglected on this trip. Celebrating some great Hawaiian birds. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

Our second day on Oʻahu was another winner. We enjoyed excellent views of Bristle-thighed Curlew, followed by amazing back-to-back flybys of Laysan Albatross and Black-footed Albatross along an identical flight path, nearly over our heads, at Kahuku Golf Course on the North Shore. What a unique experience to have on land!

The next day's flight to Kauaʻi was fortunately uneventful! Our first stop, Kīlauea Point NWR, was alive with seabirds, from Great Frigatebirds and Red-footed Boobies to nesting Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and tropicbirds, plus our first sighting of the Nēnē, Hawaii's endemic goose. At another golf course, we found a rare trio of Snow Geese and a locally nesting Laysan Albatross with a chick, a trip highlight for many. We then continued to our last stop of the day, Hanalei National Wildlife Refuge, to see the critically

endangered Hawaiian Duck. This refuge hosts some of the last members of the species that show no hybridization with Mallards.



On Oahu, no trekking is needed to find Bristle-thighed Curlews! Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

The following day, we racked up a large number of non-native but ABA-countable species, such as Red-crested Cardinal and Java Sparrow, along with some real toughies like Black Francolin and Japanese Bush Warbler. In Kōkeʻe State Park, we had a brief but spectacular flyby of Pueo, Hawaii's endemic subspecies of Short-eared Owl, and found the two expected forest-bird endemics, ʻApapane and Kauaʻi ʻElepaio.

Unfortunately, Kauaʻi's other native forest birds are in truly precipitous decline, and only now is the full picture of this year's losses coming into focus. Only a single accessible pair of ʻAnianiau was documented in the park this year (their survival is unknown), and Kauaʻi ʻAmakihi has been missing from the park for two to three years. In the remote core conservation area of the Alakaʻi Swamp, field crews have described this year's breeding season

as “quiet.” The ʻAkikiki, or Kauaʻi Creeper, has long been considered extinct in the wild or very close to it. Now, possible extinction in the wild, is being documented for ʻAkekeʻe and ʻIʻiwi, along with widespread declines in the species mentioned above. Most of this is driven by mosquito-borne avian malaria, as a warming climate makes higher elevations increasingly favorable for mosquito reproduction.



Wow, we had an excellent time at Hakalau National Wildlife Refuge with close encounters with many of the extant Hawaiian Honeycreepers. Several Hawaii Creepers gave us quite the show. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

After our sobering visit to the Alakaʻi, we found reprieve with native wetland birds, including Hawaiian Coot, Hawaiian Common Gallinule, and Hawaiian Black-necked Stilt, plus a rare White-faced Ibis. On our final morning on Kauaʻi, we hiked a lowland forest tract to find the only population of Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush in the ABA Area, a fantastic bird that moves in small troops through the forest understory.



We see a large number of non-native (ABA countable) species on this tour. The Chukar lives in middle elevation cleared areas on the Big Island. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

The actively volcanic Big Island was our last stop and the crown jewel for Hawaii's remaining native forest birds. We spent our first full day in near-pristine native forest at the famous and access-restricted Hakalau Forest NWR. The morning delivered a remarkable tally of rare and range-restricted natives: Hawai‘i ‘Amakihi, Hawai‘i Creeper, the shockingly cheese-doodle-orange Hawai‘i ‘Ākepa, the bizarre ‘Akiapōlā‘au, the ‘Ōma‘o (the native thrush), and fantastic close views of the incredible songster ‘I‘iwi. Part of the magic of the day was simply hearing the unique soundscape of native Hawaiian forest birds on the side of a misty volcano.



One of the rarest and most spectacular birds we see on tour is ʻAkiapōlāʻau. This honeycreeper fills a woodpecker niche on Big Island native forests, using its lower mandible to peck or gouge out holes in bark, and pries and probes with the upper mandible. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

The next day, we padded the trip list with some interesting non-natives such as Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse and Eurasian Skylark, then set out to repeat our luck from the previous trip and find Palila. This grosbeak-like honeycreeper, native to the Big Island, has been declining at lower elevations in recent years. Whether because the native Māmane is particularly fruitful this year or by random chance, Palila has reestablished itself at the Puʻu Laʻau preserve, and once again we were fortunate to find it. At one point, we had a family of five in view, and they allowed close approach as they happily fed on Māmane fruit. It was a fantastic way to end our Hawaiian journey, which was full of great birds, incredible landscapes, local food, culture, and gorgeous sunsets.



Blue-billed White Tern is easily seen in urban Oahu! We have a number of locations to find this local nesting species. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

Mammals seen:

Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)
Small Indian Mongoose (*Urva auropunctata*)
Hawaiian Monk Seal (*Neomonachus schauinslandi*)
Eurasian Wild Pig (*Sus scrofa*)

Herps seen:

Gold Dust Day Gecko (*Phelsuma laticauda*)
Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*)

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link:
https://ebird.org/tripreport/593778

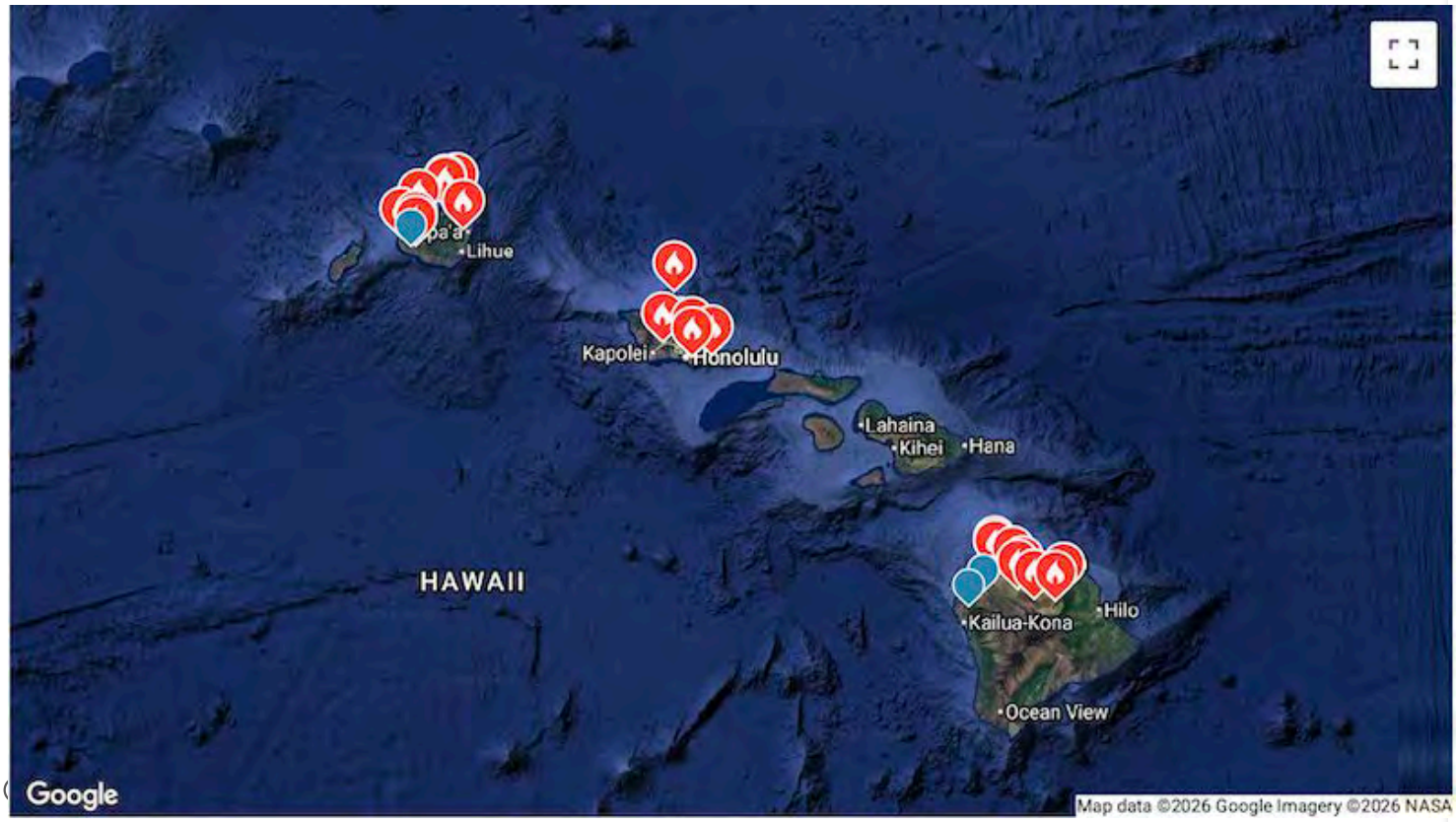
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-- Sam

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Species Observed

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3	Snow Goose	*Anser caerulescens*	1
231	Hawaiian Goose	*Branta sandvicensis*	5
4	Northern Shoveler	*Spatula clypeata*	1
2	Gadwall	*Mareca strepera*	1
1	American Wigeon	*Mareca americana*	1
11	Hawaiian Duck	*Anas wyvilliana*	2
2	Northern Pintail	*Anas acuta*	1
2	Green-winged Teal	*Anas crecca*	1
6	California Quail	*Callipepla californica* *	1
13	Wild Turkey	*Meleagris gallopavo* *	3
7	Ring-necked Pheasant	*Phasianus colchicus* *	5
7	Kalij Pheasant	*Lophura leucomelanos* *	3
1	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus* *	1
56	Red Junglefowl	*Gallus gallus* *	4
3	Gray Francolin	*Ortygornis pondicerianus* *	2
3	Black Francolin	*Francolinus francolinus* *	2
2	Chukar	*Alectoris chukar* *	1
11	Erckel's Spurfowl	*Pternistis erckelii* *	7
25	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia* *	5
24	Spotted Dove	*Spilopelia chinensis* *	8

88	Zebra Dove *Geopelia striata* ⊛	13
12	Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura* ⊛	2
2	Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus* ⊛	1
16	Common Gallinule *Gallinula galeata*	3
49	Hawaiian Coot *Fulica alai*	3
18	Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus*	2
61	Pacific Golden-Plover *Pluvialis fulva*	14
2	Bristle-thighed Curlew *Numenius tahitiensis*	1
3	Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*	1
1	Wandering Tattler *Tringa incana*	1
7	Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*	3
1	Ruff *Calidris pugnax*	1
1	Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*	1
13	Blue-billed White-Tern *Gygis candida*	2
3	White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*	2
49	Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda*	2
13	Laysan Albatross *Phoebastria immutabilis*	3
1	Black-footed Albatross *Phoebastria nigripes*	1
2	Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna pacifica*	1
7	Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor*	2
150	Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*	1
6	Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*	1
4	White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihi*	2
7	Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*	4

29	Western Cattle-Egret *Ardea ibis* ⚹	7
1	Hawaiian Hawk *Buteo solitarius*	1
1	Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*	1
14	Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* ⚹	6
6	Rosy-faced Lovebird *Agapornis roseicollis* ⚹	1
9	Hawaii Elepaio *Chasiempis sandwichensis*	2
2	Kauai Elepaio *Chasiempis sclateri*	1
1	Oahu Elepaio *Chasiempis ibidis* ✔	1
19	Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis* ⚹	5
1	Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus* ⚹	1
7	Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* ⚹	3
19	Japanese Bush Warbler *Horornis diphone* ⚹	6
62	Warbling White-eye *Zosterops japonicus* ⚹	12
8	Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea* ⚹	3
4	Chinese Hwamei *Garrulax canorus* ⚹	3
5	Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush *Pterorhinus pectoralis* ⚹	1
230	Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* ⚹	12
4	Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos* ⚹	2
4	Omao *Myadestes obscurus*	1
14	White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus* ⚹	5
26	Java Sparrow *Padda oryzivora* ⚹	3
22	Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata* ⚹	3
14	Chestnut Munia *Lonchura atricapilla* ⚹	3

16	Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild* ⊛	2
7	House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* ⊛	2
5	Palila *Loxioides bailleui*	1
53	Apapane *Himatione sanguinea*	3
25	Iiwi *Drepanis coccinea*	1
3	Akiapolaau *Hemignathus wilsoni*	1
58	Hawaii Amakihi *Chlorodrepanis virens*	2
12	Oahu Amakihi *Chlorodrepanis flava*	2
10	Hawaii Creeper *Loxops mana*	1
7	Hawaii Akepa *Loxops coccineus*	1
22	House Finch *Haemorhous mexicanus* ⊛	5
4	Yellow-fronted Canary *Crithagra mozambica* ⊛	3
7	Western Meadowlark *Sturnella neglecta* ⊛	1
17	Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis* ⊛	9
26	Red-crested Cardinal *Paroaria coronata* ⊛	9
2	Yellow-billed Cardinal *Paroaria capitata* ⊛	1
70	Saffron Finch *Sicalis flaveola* ⊛	5

EXOTIC: ESCAPEE

1	Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* ⊛	1