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Vernacular Plant Names Used on Ni'ihau Island

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EARLIER HAWAIIAN PEOPLE had a remarkable knowledge of the plants of their islands, including their medicinal and economic values and, for most of the plants, they had definite vernacular names. These names were descriptive or merely indicative, and, in large, easily recognized genera or families, the names were often binomial. Today, Hawaiians are very westernized in culture and activities. No longer does every man, woman, or older child know of nearly every plant in the vicinity—hundreds of them. It is unusual now to find a Hawaiian with much of this old knowledge of the flora.

Botanists have recorded these Hawaiian names for most of the genera and species large enough to be visible to the naked eye. To record them the botanist and the knowledgeable Hawaiian must meet together with the plant. For instance, there is no recorded common name for the local species of *Gouania*. This genus had 15 species, but because it grew mostly in the lower, dry, scrub zones, now long exploited and overgrazed, only 4 of them are possibly extant. One, *G. Hillebrandi* Oliver in Hillebrand, still occurs in pasture land at about 1000 feet above Lahaina in west Maui. It is a branching shrub 3-6 feet tall, with attractive foliage and clusters of white, fragrant flowers. After gathering good specimens of it in 1966, the writer tried to learn its Hawaiian name. No one at Lahainaluna School knew of it. Later, in Lahaina, a search was made for the older Hawaiians and the writer was sent from one to another of those reputed to know the native plants. When shown the flowering branches, none of them recognized it nor knew a name for it. Evidently, the name for this genus and species is lost.

Good informants on this lore are now few indeed. In 1938 on the island of Lana'i, the writer rode for a day with a cowboy who knew his plants and who furnished their names. In 1947 and again in 1949 the writer explored for a week on Ni'ihau Island. By good fortune, he was guided every day by Kalani Niau, the man who knew best the island and its flora. He knew the Hawaiian vernacular name for almost every plant then observed or collected, totaling 241 species. For only one native shrub, *Nototrichium sandwicense*, was he unaware of its Hawaiian name.

Ni'ihau Island still has a population of Hawaiians who have preserved much of their old culture. Their usage of plant names is worth recording. Outside contacts for people of Ni'ihau are mostly with people on Kaua'i.

Ni'ihau measures 18 miles by 6 miles and is 1281 feet in height. There is a broad lowland, but the upland is mountainous and rugged with windward cliffs. Ni'ihau is 17.5 miles southwest of Kaua'i and exactly in its lee, so it never receives any rain from the prevailing northeast trades. The island is dry and either nearly bare or with a dry scrub or grassy cover. It once had native forest on the upland, but this was destroyed by introduced cattle, sheep, and goats. Because of its aridity, it never had a rainforest.

Vernacular plant names used on Ni'ihau are organized into 4 divisions in this paper: A. names which are identical to those used for the same plants on the other Hawaiian Islands; B. names which are shared with the other islands but which have been transferred on Ni'ihau to other plants; C. names which are similar to those used for the same plants on the other islands but which have been modified on Ni'ihau; and D. names which are unique to Ni'ihau.

An asterisk (*) before a plant name indicates that the plant is a species native to the Hawaiian Islands. The other species are all exotics, either adventives or cultivated ones. In the following lists, the plants are alphabetically arranged in families in the sequence used by Engler and Prantl.

Thanks are due to Prof. Samuel H. Elbert for his comments on the manuscript, but he is not responsible for the final version that appears here.

A. Vernacular Names Identical on Ni'ihau and the Other Hawaiian Islands

Scientific Name	Hawaiian Name	Translation
Psilotaceae		
* <i>Psilotum nudum</i> (L.) Griseb.	moa	chicken
Adiantaceae		
* <i>Adiantum Capillus-Veneris</i> L.	'iwa'iwa	—
Nephrolepidaceae		
* <i>Nephrolepis exaltata</i> (L.) Schott †	ni'ani'au	—
Gramineae		
<i>Cenchrus echinatus</i> L.	'ume'alu	—
<i>Cynodon Dactylon</i> (L.) Pers.	mānienie	Marin's grass
* <i>Heteropogon contortus</i> (L.) Beauv. ex. R. & S.	pili	clinging
<i>Saccharum officinarum</i> L.	kō	—
<i>Schizostachyum glaucifolium</i> (Rupr.) Munro	'ohe	bamboo
Cyperaceae		
<i>Cyperus javanicus</i> Houtt.	'ahu'awa	—
* <i>Cyperus laevigatus</i> L.	makaloa	—
* <i>Eleocharis calva</i> Torr., var. <i>australis</i> (Nees) St. John	kohekohe	—
* <i>Scirpus californicus</i> (C.A. Mey.) Steud.	neki	—
Palmae		
<i>Phoenix dactylifera</i> L.	niu kahiki	foreign coconut
Liliaceae		
<i>Cordyline terminalis</i> (L.) Kunth., var <i>Ti</i> (Schott) J.G. Baker	lā'i	(a combination of <i>lau-ki</i> , leaf of the ti)
Moraceae		
<i>Ficus Carica</i> L.	piku	fig; from English

† See also *N. exaltata* under division B.

Scientific Name	Hawaiian Name	Translation
Aizoaceae * <i>Sesuvium Portulacastrum</i> (L.) L.	'ākulikuli	--
Portulacacaceae <i>Portulaca oleracea</i> L.	'ākulikuli	--
Lauraceae * <i>Cassytha filiformis</i> L.	kauno'a	--
Papaveraceae * <i>Argemone glauca</i> Pope	puakala	thorny flower
Leguminosae <i>Indigofera suffruticosa</i> Mill. <i>Pithecellobium dulce</i> (Roxb.) Benth. <i>Tephrosia purpurea</i> (L.) Pers. <i>Mimosa pudica</i> L. var. <i>unijuga</i> (Duchass. & Walp.) Griseb.	inikoa 'opiuma hola pua-hilahila, hilahila	indigo; from English opium; from English to spread shy flower
Zygophyllaceae * <i>Tribulus Cistoides</i> L.	nohu	spiny
Rutaceae <i>Citrus sinensis</i> (L.) Osbeck	'alani	citrus
Meliaceae <i>Melia Azedarach</i> L.	'inia	India; from pride of India
Euphorbiaceae <i>Aleurites moluccana</i> (L.) Willd. * <i>Euphorbia celastroides</i> Boiss. * <i>Euphorbia Degeneri</i> Sherff <i>Ricinus communis</i> L.	kukui, kuikui 'akoko 'akoko koli	candlenut tree bloody bloody --
Anacardiaceae <i>Mangifera indica</i> L.	manakō	mango; from English
Sapindaceae <i>Cardiospermum Halicacabum</i> L. * <i>Dodonaea eriocarpa</i> Sm., var. <i>obtusior</i> Sherff, f. <i>obtusior</i>	hale-o-ka-i'a 'a'ali'i	house of the fish --
Malvaceae <i>Gossypium barbadense</i> L. * <i>Gossypium tomentosum</i> Nutt. in Seem. <i>Hibiscus schizopetalus</i> (Mast.) Hook f. † * <i>Sida fallax</i> Walp. <i>Thespesia populnea</i> (L.) Soland ex Correa	pulupulu ma'o aloalo 'ilima milo	cotton green hibiscus -- --
Sterculiaceae <i>Waltheria indica</i> L.	hi'aloa, 'uhaloa	--
Caricaceae <i>Carica Papaya</i> L.	he'i	papaya
Cactaceae <i>Opuntia megacantha</i> Salm-Dyck	pāpipi	cattle fence
Punicaceae <i>Punica granatum</i> L.	pomelaike	pomegranate; from English

† See also *H. schizopetalus* under division B.

Scientific Name	Hawaiian Name	Translation
Myrtaceae		
<i>Eugenia cumini</i> (L.) Druce	palama	plum; from English
<i>Eucalyptus camaldulensis</i> Denh.	palepiwa	to keep off the fever
<i>Eucalyptus robusta</i> Sm.	palepiwa	to keep off the fever
Araliaceae		
* <i>Reynoldsia sandwicensis</i> Gray	'ohe'ohe	--
Asclepiadaceae		
<i>Asclepias curassavica</i> L.	nu'umela	--
Convolvulaceae		
* <i>Ipomoea brasiliensis</i> (L.) Sweet	pōhuehue	--
* <i>Ipomoea stolonifera</i> (Cyrill.) Gmel.	hunakai	spray of the sea
* <i>Jacquemontia sandwicensis</i> Gray	pā'ū-a-hi'i-'aka	skirt of Hi-i-'aka
Boraginaceae		
<i>Cordia Sebestena</i> L.	kou haole	foreign <i>kou</i>
<i>Cordia subcordata</i> Lam.	kou	--
Verbenaceae		
<i>Verbena litoralis</i> HBK.	ha'uōwi	--
Solanaceae		
<i>Capsicum annuum</i> L.	nīoi	--
* <i>Lycium sandwicense</i> Gray	'ae'ae	to rise up
<i>Nicotiana Tabacum</i> L.	paka	tobacco; from English
<i>Solanum nigrum</i> L. †	pōpolo	purplish blue
Myoporaceae		
* <i>Myoporum sandwicense</i> (A. DC.) Gray, var. <i>sandwicense</i>	naio	--
Rubiaceae		
<i>Morinda citrifolia</i> L.	noni	--
Compositae		
<i>Ageratum conyzoides</i> L.	maile-hohono	acrid-smelling maile
* <i>Bidens Stokesii</i> Sherff	ko'oko'olau	--
<i>Emilia javanica</i> (Burm. f.) C. B. Robins.	pua-lele	jumping flower
* <i>Lipochaeta lobata</i> (Gaud.) DC., var. <i>incisior</i> St. John	nehe	rustling
<i>Sonchus oleraceus</i> L.	pua-lele	jumping flower
<i>Xanthium</i> sp.	kikānia	--

Total Number: 65

† See also *S. nigrum* under division D.

B. Vernacular Names Shared with Other Islands But Transferred on Ni'ihau to Other Plants

Scientific Name	Ni'ihau Hawaiian Name	Translation	Referent Elsewhere
Nephrolepidaceae * <i>Nephrolepis exaltata</i> (L.) Schott †	palapalai	—	<i>Microlepia setosa</i> (Sm.) Alston
Hemionitidaceae * <i>Pityrogramma calomelanos</i> (L.) Link	palapalai	—	<i>Microlepia setosa</i> (Sm.) Alston
Sinopteridaceae * <i>Doryopteris decipiens</i> (Hook.) J. Sm.	kalamoho, alamoho	—	<i>Pellaea ternifolia</i> (Cav.) Link
Gramineae * <i>Sporobolus virginicus</i> (L.) Kunth	mahiki	to exorcise	<i>Cynodon Dactylon</i> (L.) Pers.
Cyperaceae <i>Cyperus rotundus</i> L.	pipiwai	to sprinkle water	<i>Eleocharis obtusa</i> (Willd.) Schult, var. <i>gigantea</i> (Clarke) Fern.
* <i>Cyperus trachysanthos</i> H. & A.	ka'a	to twist	<i>Cyperus ferax</i> L. C. Rich., var. <i>auriculatus</i> (Nees & Mey.) Kuek., forma <i>auriculatus</i>
Amaryllidaceae <i>Fucrea foetida</i> (L.) Haw.	malina, malina haole	twisting fiber	<i>Agave sisalana</i> Perrine ex Engelm.
Batidaceae <i>Batis maritima</i> L.	'ae'ae	edible Lycium	<i>Lycium sandwicense</i> Gray
Polygonaceae <i>Antigonon leptopus</i> H. & A.	waina pua	flower of grape vine	<i>Vitis Labrusca</i> L.
Capparaceae * <i>Capparis sandwichiana</i> DC.	pilo	—	<i>Coprosma</i> spp.
Leguminosae <i>Albizzia Lebbeck</i> (L.) Benth.	'ohai	—	<i>Sesbania tomentosa</i> H. & A.
<i>Crotalaria incana</i> L.	kolomona	Solomon flower	<i>Cassia</i> spp.
<i>Desmodium uncinatum</i> (Jacq.) DC.	pilipili'ula	red and sticky	<i>Chrysopogon aciculatus</i> (Retz.) Trin.
<i>Leucaena leucocephala</i> (Lam.) de Wit††	koa	—	<i>Acacia Koa</i> Gray
<i>Phaseolus lathyroides</i> L.	uhiuhi	—	<i>Mezoneuron kavaense</i> (Mann) Hbd.

† See also *N. exaltata* under division A.

†† See also *L. leucocephala* under division D.

Scientific Name	Ni'ihau Hawaiian Name	Translation	Referent Elsewhere
Rutaceae <i>Citrus grandis</i> (L.) Osbeck	'alani Pākē	Chinese orange	<i>Citrus reticulata</i> Blanco, cv Deliciosa
Malvaceae <i>Abutilon grandifolium</i> (Willd.) Sweet <i>Hibiscus schizopetalus</i> (Mast.) Hook. f. †	hau-hele kulapepeaio	walking hibiscus lacy hibiscus	<i>Hibiscus Youngianus</i> Gaud. ex H. & A. <i>Fuchsia magellanica</i> Lam.
Umbelliferae <i>Hydrocotyle verticillata</i> Thunb.	lau-kāhi	rubbing leaf	<i>Plantago major</i> L.
Sapotaceae <i>Manilkara Zapota</i> (L.) v. Royen	momona	sweet	<i>Annona Cherimola</i> Mill.
Solanaceae * <i>Solanum Nelsoni</i> Dunal in A. DC.	ākia	bitten by	<i>Wikstroemia</i> spp.
Scrophulariaceae * <i>Bacopa Monnieria</i> (L.) Wettst.	'ae'ae	soft	<i>Lycium sandwicense</i> Gray
Bignoniaceae <i>Tecomaria capensis</i> (Thunb.) Spach	makahala	--	<i>Cestrum aurantiacum</i> Lindl. and <i>Nicotiana glauca</i> Grah.
Compositae <i>Erigeron bonariensis</i> L. * <i>Lipochaeta kawaihoensis</i> St. John	lani-wela ko'oko'olau	heat of heaven -	<i>Erigeron canadensis</i> L. <i>Bidens</i> spp.

Total Number: 25

† See also *H. schizopetalus* under division A.

C. Vernacular Names Similar to Those Used on Other Islands but Modified on Ni'ihau

Scientific Name	Ni'ihau Hawaiian Name	Translation	Variet Name Elsewhere
Gramineae * <i>Panicum torridum</i> Gaud.	hākonakona	coarse grass	kākonakona
Bromeliaceae <i>Ananas comosus</i> (Stickm.) Merr.	hala	—	hala-kahiki
Amaranthaceae <i>Amaranthus viridis</i> L.	pakapakai	—	pakai
Proteaceae <i>Grevillea robusta</i> A. Cunn. in R. Br.	'oka	—	'oka-kilika
Chenopodiaceae <i>Chenopodium album</i> L. * <i>Chenopodium oahuense</i> (Meyen) Aellen	pakapakai alaweo huna	— secret goosefoot	'āheahea, pakai alaweo
Leguminosae <i>Cassia occidentalis</i> L. * <i>Sesbania tomentosa</i> H. & A.	miki-palaoa 'ohai-a-papia-huli	— —	miki-palalo 'ohai
Convolvulaceae * <i>Cuscuta sandwichiana</i> Choisy * <i>Ipomoea cairica</i> (L.) Sweet * <i>Ipomoea indica</i> (Burm.) Merr.	kuanoa-lei koali 'ai'ai koali lā'au	lei of dodder edible morning glory medicinal swing plant	kaunao'a-lei koali 'ai koali-awa
Solanaceae <i>Lycopersicon esculentum</i> Mill., subsp. <i>Galenii</i> (Mill.) Luckwill	'ohi'a	—	'ohi'a-lomi
Verbenaceae <i>Lantana Camara</i> L.	lanakana	lantana	lākana
Goodeniaceae * <i>Scaevola Taccada</i> (Gaertn.) Roxb., var. <i>sericea</i> (Vahl) St. John	aupaka	—	naupaka

Total Number: 14

D. Vernacular Names Unique to Ni'ihau

Scientific Name	Ni'ihau Hawaiian Name	Translation
Marsileaceae * <i>Marsilea villosa</i> Kaulf.	'ihi la'au	medicinal sorrel
Potamogetonaceae * <i>Potamogeton pectinatus</i> L.	limu alolo	worthless kelp
Ruppiaceae * <i>Ruppia maritima</i> L., var. <i>pacifica</i> St. John & Fosb., f. <i>pacifica</i>	limu pa kai	marine kelp
Gramineae <i>Andropogon barbinodis</i> Lag. <i>Andropogon sericeus</i> R. Br. <i>Cymbopogon refractus</i> (R. Br.) A. Camus <i>Echinochloa colonum</i> (L.) Link * <i>Eragrostis niuhauensis</i> Whitney * <i>Panicum Colliei</i> Endl. * <i>Panicum Heupueo</i> St. John <i>Panicum maximum</i> Jacq. * <i>Panicum niuhauense</i> St. John <i>Rhynchelytrum repens</i> (Willd.) C. E. Hubb.	ma'u haole huelo popoki mānienie mahiki ma'u alolo kāwelu kāi'oi'o he'u-pueo mau'u pūlumi lau-ehu pua'ula'ula	foreign grass cat's tail exorcising grass worthless grass wind-blown grass irregular grass fine hairs, or hoot of the owl ditch grass reddish leaf red flower
Cyperaceae * <i>Fimbristylis pycnocephala</i> Hbd.	mau'u-'aki'aki	nibbled grass
Nyctaginaceae * <i>Boerhavia diffusa</i> L., var. <i>sandwicensis</i> Heimerl <i>Bougainvillea spectabilis</i> Willd.	anena pua pepa	— paper flower
Proteaceae <i>Grevillea Banksii</i> R. Br.	oka pua 'ula'ula	red-flowered oak
Portulacaceae * <i>Portulaca cyanosperma</i> Egler	'ākulikuli	—
Cruciferae <i>Coronopus didymus</i> (L.) Sm.	'ihi'ihi-i-one	on the sand
Leguminosae <i>Abrus precatorius</i> L., f. <i>precatorius</i> f. <i>lutiseminalis</i> St. John <i>Caesalpinia Bonduc</i> (L.) Roxb. * <i>Canavalia pubescens</i> H. & A. <i>Cassia Leschenaultiana</i> DC. <i>Ceratonia Siliqua</i> L. <i>Crotalaria pallida</i> Ait. <i>Crotalaria spectabilis</i> Roth <i>Leucaena leucocephala</i> (Lam.) de Wit†	pūkiawe-'ula'ula pūkiawe-lenalena kinikini paunu ti Kepani 'ūhini kolomona kolomona koa mahu	red Styphelia yellow Styphelia marbles — Japanese tea — Solomon flower Solomon flower imitation <i>koa</i>
Euphorbiaceae <i>Euphorbia hirta</i> L. <i>Jatropha Curcas</i> L.	lihilihi kakahiaka kukui Pākē	fringe of the morning Chinese kukui
Rhamnaceae * <i>Colubrina asiatica</i> (L.) Brongn.	kolokolo	—

† See also *L. leucocephala* under division B.

Scientific Name	Ni'ihau Hawaiian Name	Translation
Malvaceae <i>Malva parviflora</i> L.	hō'nā	—
Tamaricaceae <i>Tamarix gallica</i> L.	paina pupupu and paina kahakai	thick-growing pine and beach pine
Passifloraceae <i>Passiflora foetida</i> L.	lani-wai	water from heaven
Myrtaceae <i>Psidium Guajava</i> L. <i>Psidium Cattleianum</i> Sabine	puawa waiawi	guava; from English --
Plumbaginaceae * <i>Plumbago zeylanica</i> L.	lauhihi	entwining leaf
Oleaceae <i>Noronhia emarginata</i> (Lam.) Stadm. in Thouars <i>Olea europaea</i> L.	palama waiū 'oliwa haole	milky plum foreign olive
Asclepiadaceae <i>Calotropis gigantea</i> (L.) R. Br.	lili'u	burning, smarting
Hydrophyllaceae * <i>Nama sandwicensis</i> Gray	hinahina kahakai	silvery beach plant
Boraginaceae * <i>Heliotropium anomalum</i> H. & A. var <i>argenteum</i> Gray * <i>Heliotropium curassavicum</i> L.	nohonoho-pu'uone lau po'opo'ohina	sand dune heliotrope sunken
Solanaceae <i>Solanum nigrum</i> L.†	pōpolohua, or pōpolo	purplish blue
Cucurbitaceae * <i>Sicyos niihauensis</i> St. John	pua-o-kama	—
Lobeliaceae * <i>Brighamia insignis</i> Gray in Mann	'ōlulu pu-aupaka	shaking --
Compositae <i>Eclipta alba</i> (L.) Hassk. * <i>Gnaphalium sandwicense</i> Gad. f. <i>sandwicense</i>	pua-o-ka-lani pu-heu	flower of heaven finely haired flower

Total Number: 49

Summary of Ni'ihau Vernacular Plant Names

Identical Names	65
Transferred Names	25
Modified Names	14
Unique Names	49
TOTAL	153

† See also *S. nigrum* under division A.

It will be noted that more than one-third of the plant names used on Ni'ihau are identical to those used on the larger islands of the Hawaiian group. Fourteen names are modified forms or cognates of the standard ones used elsewhere. Twenty-five are well-known Hawaiian names, but on Ni'ihau they are applied to other plants. In most cases, the species regularly called elsewhere by these names do not occur on Ni'ihau. These pairs of species are mostly similar in habitat and appearance.

The remaining species, 49 of them, have on Ni'ihau unique vernacular names, here recorded for the first time. Since 7 of the species are endemic to Ni'ihau, one might expect them to have unique names, but all of them are in genera common to the island group. Consequently, they might well have had a known group name, but such is not the case. The nearby island of Kaua'i, before the enforced standardization, had the most distinct Hawaiian dialect. The evidence here presented on the Ni'ihau vernacular plant names suggests that Ni'ihau was also notably distinct in its vocabulary.