

LESSER FRIGATEBIRD

Fregata ariel

breeding visitor, occasional, indigenous

F. a. ariel

The Lesser Frigatebird breeds widely in the tropical and subtropical W and central Pacific east to the Phoenix, Line, Tuamotu, and Marquesas Is, and in the Indian and S Atlantic oceans (King 1967, Sibley and Clapp 1967, Harrison 1983, Marchant and Higgins 1990, AOU 1998). Visitors have reached Micronesia (Wiles 2005), Johnston Atoll (Amerson and Shelton 1976) and the Hawaiian Islands, particularly the Northwestern Islands, where at least one unsuccessful nesting attempt occurred at French Frigate Shoals (Dearborn and Anders 2000). Wilson and Evans (1899) suspected that "*F. minor*", referring to Lesser Frigatebird, might also occur in Hawaii, but the basis for this conjecture is unclear.

In the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands*, the POBSP recorded the first Lesser Frigatebirds at **Kure** 25 May 1967 (USNM 497833, [HRBP](#) 5100-5101 of specimen) and 25 Jun 1968 (banded and released), both adult females (Woodward 1972). Another female appeared on Green I 6 Apr 1981, and adult males were photographed there 27 Sep-13 Oct 1983 (Pyle 1984; [HRBP](#) 0253-0255, 0589-0590, 1396, published *AB* 38:249) and 14 Jul 2008 ([HRBP](#) 5909-5910). Lesser Frigatebirds have more recently been observed at **Midway**, usually soaring over Eastern and Sand Is and occasionally perching with roosting Great Frigatebirds. Records occurred almost annually here from 14 Jan 1996 to 2001, a period of significantly greater observer effort at Midway; records have included both adult males and adult females, and all but the first one have been in spring and summer (22 Mar-19 Aug). Lesser Frigatebirds have occurred twice on **Laysan**, an adult male 9 Aug 1996 and 2 adult males 28 Feb 1998.

At **French Frigate** an adult male Lesser Frigatebird appeared in a colony of Great Frigatebirds on Tern I. 11 Jul - 1 Oct 1983, and thereafter 1-3 individuals have been recorded during most years through the 2000s, in all months but primarily during Mar-Nov (Dearborn and Anders 2000; [HRBP](#) 0483-0489, 0833, 0871-0872, 5702-5704, 5933-5935). Most have been of single adult males, with two males present in Apr-May 1989 and 3 together 25 May 1990. Females were first reported in fall 1989 and continued to appear regularly throughout the 1990s. In 1998 a male showed an inflated gular sac in Mar and was seen perched together with a female at a nest in May ([HRBP](#) 5702-5704). On 1 Jun 1998 the female Lesser Frigatebird was discovered on a nest with an egg (*AB* 52:393), which was found broken on the ground 16 Jun (Dearborn and Anders 2000). Attempted copulations between male Lesser and female [Great Frigatebirds](#) apparently resulted in at least one female thought to be a hybrid observed there in 1998 (Dearborn and Anders 2000). Observations of 1-2 males and a female have continued at French Frigate through 2009 (e.g., photos *NAB* 62:174-175). The subspecies of birds breeding in the Pacific, of which at least these records undoubtedly apply, is the nominate *F.a. ariel*; two other subspecies breed in the Atlantic and Indian oceans.

In the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands* Lesser Frigatebirds (usually adult males) have been described at least 5 times since 1989 as single unrepeated reports from popular observation sites on **Kaua'i** (Waimea Canyon overlook 6 Nov 1991, Kilauea Pt. 9 Oct 2002, and Poipu 25 Nov 2009), **O'ahu** (Ulupau Head 23 Oct 1992), and **Mau'i** (Kealia Pond NWR 18 Jan 1989 and two over Kula 13 Oct 1992). The HICEAS survey recorded

just one Lesser Frigatebird during 93 observing days *at sea* in Hawaiian waters: 92 km SW of O'ahu 25 Nov 2002 (Rowlett 2002). This is the only pelagic observation of this species in Hawaiian waters.

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

Citation: Pyle, R.L., and P. Pyle. 2009. The Birds of the Hawaiian Islands: Occurrence, History, Distribution, and Status. B.P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu, HI, U.S.A. Version 1 (31 December 2009)
<http://hbs.bishopmuseum.org/birds/rlp-monograph/>