

## COMMON MYNA

## *Acridotheres tristis*

Other: Mynah, Mina, Indian Myna, House Myna, *Piakelo* (*Piha'ekelo*)

*A.t. tristis*

### **naturalized (non-native) resident, long established**

Common Mynas are native to India, the Middle East, and the Himalayan region (Dement'ev and Gladkov 1954a, Ali and Ripley 1987, AOU 1998, Kannan and James 2001) and have been introduced to many localities around the world including Florida (Pranty 2007), Fiji, and islands in the Cook, Society (including Tahiti), and Marquesan archipelagos (Long 1981, Lever 1987, Pratt et al. 1987, Cramp and Perrins 1994a). In 1866 they were introduced into the Hawaiian Islands, in a successful attempt to control cutworm moths (*Spodoptera mauritia*) affecting agriculture, particularly sugarcane plantations (Perkins and Swezey 1924, Caum 1933, Bryan 1937b, Northwood 1952, Laycock 1966; *E* 4:25), and they have since spread to all *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands* (as well as Midway Atoll in the 1970s) where they occur abundantly and conspicuously in human-altered areas, from sea level to (less commonly) over 2400 m elevation.

The Honolulu physician and botanist William Hillebrand, known for his devotion toward introducing non-native trees and other plants to Hawaii, brought Common Mynas to Honolulu after a trip to China, Calcutta, and Java, arriving in Honolulu in Jun or Jul 1866 (not 1865 as often quoted). Along with a cargo full of plants Hillebrand returned with "carrion crows, gold finches, Japanese finches, mynah birds, Chinese quail, ricebirds, Indian sparrows; golden, silver and Mongolian pheasants; and [two] deer from China and Java" (Meier 2005:37). By 1879 Common Mynas were found in "immense numbers" in Honolulu (Finsch 1880) and were established on all Southeastern Islands by the late 1890s (Henshaw 1900b, 1902a; Perkins 1903). Whether or not they were purposely released on other islands is not known, but observations of individuals flying across channels (Fisher 1951) along with genetic evidence (see below) suggests that they could have easily colonized the other islands on their own.

No introduced species in Hawaii has elicited so much opinion as the Common Myna, perhaps in part due to its intelligence and amusing anthropomorphic qualities. Although they were thought to be of "great value to the aviculturist" in Hawaii for controlling pests (Bryan 1937b), it was also generally vilified for its noisy habits, "quarrelsome" and opportunistic nature, disturbance to domestic pigeons, fruit-eating and nest-robbing habits, and the possibility of its adversely affecting native bird populations (e.g., Finsch 1880; Wilson 1890a; Rothschild 1900; Perkins 1901, *in* Evenhuis 2007:75). Its song has been described as "about as musical as a cat-fight" (Slivers 1892:77). Writers in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., Henshaw 1902a; W.A. Bryan 1905b; E.H. Bryan 1937a, 1937b; Munro 1927, 1944; Pedley 1949; *PoP* 54[11]:13) defended it against these charges, suggesting that "the bird's advantages to the islands are popularly decidedly underrated, while its disadvantages are overemphasized" (Caum 1933) and that "even if the mynah is not an ideal bird it is better than no bird at all" (Henshaw 1900b). But later writers again castigated the myna in Hawaii, pointing out its role in spreading noxious weeds including *Lantana*, serving as a host for parasites and avian diseases, predated seabird nests, setting buildings afire with lighted cigarettes, and perhaps competing with 'o'os for cavity nest sites (Perkins and Swezey 1924; McAtee 1925; Fisher 1948c;

Northwood 1952; Laycock 1966; Berger 1972, 1975a, 1981; Byrd 1979; Grant 1982b; Scott et al. 1986; Baker et al. 1999). They do seem to have been exonerated from the charge of competing directly with native landbirds (Scott et al. 1986; see below); in any event, like the European Starling in North America, the Common Myna appears to be in Hawaii to stay (Henshaw 1902a), and their abundant status does not appear to have fluctuated much throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The first indication of Common Mynas on *Kaua'i* were of specimens collected there by Palmer in the early 1890s and sent to Rothschild (1900), although their reported unassisted arrival to *Ni'ihau* "some time after 1870" (Fisher 1951) suggests that they were on *Kaua'i* as well by this time. Bryan and Seale (1901) noted them common everywhere on *Kaua'i*, as high as the summit to Mt. Waialeale. Richardson and Bowles (1964) estimated many 1000s on the island but indicated that they did not penetrate the native forest, as was also found by Sincock (USFWS 1983c), Scott et al. (1986), and Foster et al. (2004). [Christmas Count](#) data indicate a slight but significant decline in mynas around Kapa'a during the 1970s-2000s ([Graph](#)) whereas numbers on the Lihue count showed no trend from 1972 to 1991. On *Ni'ihau* they were "ubiquitous" in 1946 (Fisher 1947) and sporadic reports through the early 2000s (e.g., T. Telfer *in* Kannan and James 2001) indicate a similar status.

On *O'ahu* all accounts indicate them to be abundant and widespread in non-native habitats since at least Jun 1879 (Finsch 1880, Bryan 1905b, Shauninsland 1906, Caum 1933, Shallenberger and Vaughn 1978), although Perkins and Swezey (1924) noted that numbers had decreased somewhat by 1905. Data from the Honolulu [Christmas Count](#) show an interesting apparent shift toward higher populations during the mid-1960s ([Graph](#)), perhaps due to greater emphasis on counting birds at roosts (Williams 1987, Ralph 1990), which typically occur in larger banyan (*Ficus*) and monkeypod (*Pithecellobium*) trees around Honolulu and elsewhere, and can number in the thousands (E 26:48-49). Norwood (1952) and Laycock (1966) provide amusing accounts of attempts to mitigate a roost site on the grounds of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel in Waikiki. Elsewhere in Honolulu they breed primarily in Feb-Jul (Eddinger 1967), occasionally earlier; Northwood (1940b) and Richardson and Fisher (1950) observed them breeding on Manana Islet. Shauninsland (1906) found mynas still to be uncommon on *Moloka'i*, as compared to numbers on *O'ahu*, and Bryan (1908) seemed to reflect the same sentiments based on observations in Apr-Jun 1907, but by the 1960s they were regarded as abundant throughout the island (Pekelo 1964). During the [HFBS](#) in 1979-1980, Scott et al. (1986) found them most common in disturbed, open, and drier habitats on *Moloka'i* (as well as on *Lana'i*, and *Maui*). On *Lana'i* they were common in the 1910-1920s (Munro 2007) and remained widespread and abundant in the 1980s-2000s. We are aware of only one report from *Kaho'olawe*, recorded as present in Smuggler's Cove 17 Apr 1992; they doubtless visit the island from time to time although the lack of observation by survey teams there (Conant 1983a, Gon et al. 1992, Morin et al. 1998, and visits during the 2000s) indicates that they are probably not established as breeding residents there.

Finsch (1880) was first to note a few mynas on *Maui*, in the Isthmus in Jun 1879, and Bryan (1901b) also mentions 10 specimens collected on *Maui* by Newell (locality of specimens unknown). By 1899-1900 they were noted to be the most abundant bird on the island by McGregor (1902), who added that "the vocalization of a flock discounts the House Sparrow and Blue Jay combined" and is "anything but entertaining to the person

whose trees they frequent". There was little indication of any change in the population status of Common Myna on Maui during the ensuing century, notwithstanding speculation of increasing populations during the 1990s (Kannan and James 2001). On *Hawai'i I*, Henshaw (1900b) believed that mynas made their first appearance (or were introduced) near Hamakua in about 1875, and that they had rapidly expanded during the late 1890s to "become very numerous" on the island; he collected several specimens in 1897-1898 (USNM). In 1892 they had just reached Kona, with a flock of about a dozen present (Perkins and Swezey 1924). Dunmire (1961, 1962) noted them uncommonly in Volcano NP during the late 1950s and early 1960s, indicating that they were more common there in the breeding season than in winter; no trends were evident during 1972-2007 according to Volcano [Christmas Count](#) data. During the [HFBS](#) mynas were seldom if at all observed in higher-elevation native forests (Scott et al. 1986).

In the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands* a pair of Common Mynas was first observed on *Midway* in early Dec 1971 (*E* 32:78), probably having arrived there on a cargo plane, given the lack of other records for any other island in this group. By 1977-1978 they were reported to be numerous (*E* 39:76), and Naval pest control agents were shooting them to prevent diseases and run-ins with aircraft. Control measures were not effective, as the population had increased to about 500 by the winter of 1979-1980 (Grant and Petit 1981) and was thought to be larger during the following winter (*E* 43:3). During the 1980-2000s population estimates varied between 200 (in 1983) to over 1000 (e.g., Grant 1982b, Richardson 1992, Baker et al. 1999), and variation on the [Christmas Count](#) of 25 in 1979 increasing to 1002 in 2001 and decreasing to 79 in 2007, but differing observers, population survey techniques, and seasons of effort may account for most of this variation.

Birds introduced to Hawaii (and elsewhere around the world) are of the nominate subspecies *A.t. tristis* (Kannan and James 2001; PP examination); a darker subspecies (*A.t. melanosternus*) occurs in s. India. Morphometric and genetic analyses indicate that founder effects and bottlenecks have differentiated Hawaiian populations from native populations quite substantially, perhaps to the level of recognized subspecies (Gibson et al. 1984, Baker and Moeed 1987), but that among Hawaiian Islands there is little differentiation, indicating gene flow due to movements of individuals between islands (Fleischer et al. 1991a).

### [Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

### [Literature cited](#)

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