

ORANGE-CHEEKED WAXBILL

Estrilda melpoda

naturalized (non-native) resident, recently established

E.m. melpoda?

Orange-cheeked Waxbills are native to W Africa, from Senegal and Gambia to Chad and Zambia (AOU 1998). Introduced populations have become established in Bermuda, Puerto Rico, and Saipan, N. Marianas Is (Long 1981, Lever 1987, AOU 1998, Wiles 2005), as well as the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands*, where increasing populations became established on O'ahu during the 1960-2000s and on Maui during the 1990-2000s. Orange-cheeked Waxbills do not suffer the identification and nomenclatural problems besetting the [Black-rumped](#) and [Common](#) waxbills (Ord 1982, Falkenmayer 1988), but it is similar enough in appearance to these two species that not all reports of Orange-cheeked Waxbills can be assumed correctly identified.

On **O'ahu**, Orange-cheeked Waxbills along with several other released cage birds were noted for the first time on 15 Oct 1965, when 8 (4 pairs) were noted along the Na La'au trail on the w. slopes of Diamond Head (*E* 26:54). Numbers rapidly increased in this area, with 30 recorded on the 2 Jan 1966 Honolulu [Christmas Bird Count](#) (*E* 26:78), and 23-32 observed on each count between 1967 and 1970 (see [Graph](#)). Thereafter counts in the Diamond Head area gradually dwindled, the last verified reports occurring in 1988-1989. A waxbill seen at Ewa Beach 2 Nov 1973 (Berger 1979, 1981) and a flock of 20 at Waipi'o 29 May 1978 plus a few other observations through 1979 (*E* 39:75) were not described and may have pertained to Common Waxbills, which were apparently first detected but not identified in the area at this time. First reports of Orange-cheeked Waxbills in windward O'ahu occurred 23 Dec 1986, when three were observed in Kaneohe. Numbers along the windward coast, from Punalu'u to Mokapu Peninsula, remained small but stable through the mid 2000s, after which they declined (see [Graph](#)), perhaps due to competition with Common Waxbill. The last verified observations in this area were of two birds from the Bayview Golf Course in Kaneohe in Jan 2008, but effort to look for them after this was low. Elsewhere on O'ahu, observations from Haleiwa in May 1983, Kahuku in Nov 1987 and Mar 2000, Pearl City in May 1989, the Honolulu Airport in Apr 1992, Kaena Point in Aug 1992, and Hawaii Kai in Feb 2004 could be correct but were not described, and may have pertained to transcription errors or confusion with the two other similar waxbill species.

The first report of Orange-cheeked Waxbills from **Maui** was of five birds observed near Pu'unene 15 Aug 1989. The lack of records from Moloka'i suggests that these birds originated from a separate release on Maui rather than dispersing on their own from O'ahu. Numbers in c. Maui gradually increased during the 1990-2000s, with high counts of 50 or more recorded near Kealia Pond NWR in 2005 and continuing as "common" through the 2000s (*cf.* [HRBP](#) 5948-5950). The geographic area for sightings on Maui during this period ranged from Ma'alaea and Kihei to Kahalui Reports from other islands, likely pertaining to local escapes if correct, include Kapa'a, Kaua'i in Oct 1975 (*E* 36:153), and Hilo, Hawai'i I in Jan 1984.

The subspecies of the Hawaii populations have not been determined for certain but photographs (e.g., [HRBP](#) 5948-5950) suggest the widespread nominate subspecies (at least on Maui) as opposed to the more restricted *E.m. tschadensis* from the N portions of the species range.

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)
[Literature cited](#)