

## SAFFRON FINCH

*Sicalis flaveola*

**naturalized (non-native) resident, recently established**

*S.f. flaveola*

Saffron Finches are native to S America and have been successfully introduced to Panama, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and on O'ahu and Hawai'i I in the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands* (Long 1981, Lever 1987, Ridgely and Tudor 1989, AOU 1998). Populations on both islands have been established since introduction in the mid 1960s.

On *O'ahu*, Saffron Finches were first reported from the w. slopes of Diamond Head in the fall of 1965 (*E* 26:54). Throughout 1966 a pair was observed in Kapiolani Park (*E* 26:90, 26:111, 27: 64), and numbers in this vicinity increased during the 1970s, peaking at 22 individuals on the Honolulu [Christmas Bird Count](#) 17 Dec 1972 (*E* 33:79), but they then declined there by the early 1980s ([Graph](#)). Away from Honolulu, a pair showed up at Bellows Field in Dec 1972 (*E* 33:79), they were found in Manoa Valley up to Lyon Arboretum in 1975-1976 (e.g., *E* 36:155, 37:47), and they were reported spreading toward Peal Harbor in Jan 1975 and nesting by 1977 (*E* 35:146, 38:37). Populations and range appeared to decline during ensuing years ([Graph](#)), prompting HAS (1986) to state that they were no longer on the island, but continued sporadic observations (e.g., *E* 47:42, 48:31, 48:114) indicated that they were persisting in small numbers. By the 1990s numbers were again detected in the Pearl Harbor area, including Pearl City and Kunia, and numbers increased in this area through the 2000s ([Graph](#); Ralph 1990; *E* 61:75, 78). In the 1990s Saffron Finches were also seen sporadically around Honolulu ([Graph](#)), including Kapiolani Park again, Salt Lake in Moanalua, and Hawaii Kai. In the 2000s they were turning up in Waipahu, Mililani, Ewa Beach, and Nanakuli (where 50 were found 22 Oct 2004), and numbers elsewhere were elevating, indicating increasing and expanding populations throughout drier portions of the island (HAS 2005).

On *Hawai'i I*, individuals were apparently released along with other finches and waxbills at the Pu'u Wa'a Wa'a Ranch in or before 1965 and they were reported to be increasing by Dec 1967 (*E* 28:107). By 1969-1971 they were considered "abundant" at Pu'u Wa'a Wa'a and were observed at Kamuela (van Riper 1978). Expansion was rapid during the 1970-1980s (Scott et al. 1986): by 1973 they were reported from Mt Hualalai (*E* 34:3), by 1978 they were "well-established" in Kona (*E* 39:20), in 1979 they were first noted at Hapuna Beach (*E* 41:78) and quickly became abundant there, by 1984 they had spread south to Keahou and were increasing, by 1985 they had reached Captain Cook, by 1986 they were observed at Pohakuloa along the Saddle Road, and by 1989 they had shown up in Hilo. It was not considered established on Hawai'i I by Berger (1972) but considered established by Pyle (1977) and Berger (1981). In Kona numbers continued to increase, with a peak count of 476 on the North Kona [Christmas Count](#) 20 Dec 1992 (*E* 53:48). By the 1990s-2000s they had become established throughout the island including Volcano (e.g., 4 recorded there on the 2003 [Christmas Count](#)), being one of the most common species in drier and man-altered habitats.

On *Kaua'i* up to six Saffron Finches were observed in Waimea near a house with exotic birds in cages in Oct 2004 to Mar 2005, including two begging juveniles in Mar. By 2004 they were spreading here (e.g., [HRBP](#) 5937-5938) and by 2008 had been observed at Kekaha and in PRMF at the W end of the island, on the way to apparent

establishment on Kaua'i. It is unknown whether or not they reached the island on their own or not. On Maui a pair was observed and nested (raising one young) in a back yard at Pukalani in Apr 1997-Mar 1998, and a single individual observed there in Dec 2001-Feb 2002 (e.g., *E* 62:120) was targeted for removal by DOFAW. We consider these local releases (see [Chestnut Munia](#)). Otherwise, there have been no other reports from Maui Nui.

Four subspecies of Saffron Finch have been recognized (Ridgley and Tudor 1989, Clement et al. 1993, Clements 2007) in two subspecies groups (sometime considered separate species). Hawaii populations have been identified as of the *S.f. flaveola* group residing from Ecuador and nw. Peru to e. Colombia, n. Venezuela, and ne. Brazil (AOU 1998). Within this group, specimen examination (PP) and field observation indicate that they are of the nominate subspecies *flaveola* of n. S America as opposed to *S.f. valida* of Ecuador and Peru.

### [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/>