

AFRICAN SILVERBILL

Lonchura cantans

Other: Warbling Silverbill (<2002)

L.c. cantans

naturalized (non-native) resident, recently established

The African Silverbill has long been known in Hawaii as the "Warbling Silverbill (*Lonchura malabarica*)" until Indian and African taxa were officially split (see Goodwin 1982, Restall 1996 for details), the African species becoming *L. cantans*. Nomenclatural confusion (see Falkenmayer 1988 for details) resulted in the AOU (1998) mistakenly attributing Hawaiian populations to White-throated (Indian) Silverbill (*L. malabarica*) but this was sorted out by the AOU (2000). The African Silverbill is native to Africa S of the Sahara Desert (Goodwin 1982, Restall 1996), and was successfully introduced to the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands* in the 1970s, whereas introduced populations of White-throated Silverbill occur on Puerto Rico and elsewhere in the Caribbean (Long 1981, Lever 1987, AOU 2000). A specimen collected in Hawaii prior to 1878 may have been of a White-throated Silverbill (see [Non-Established List](#))

African Silverbills were first introduced to Hawai'i I, probably in the mid 1960s, and were observed almost sequentially northward through all Southeastern Islands indicating a natural dispersal; one or two observed about 30 km off the Kona coast 28 Oct 2009 ([HRBP](#) 5947) is testimony to their ability to cross open-water channels. On *Hawai'i I*, the first report was of a specimen found near a water tank in the Pu'uuanahulu Game Management Area 2 May 1972 (Berger 1975d, 1981; *E* 36:27), indicating that they were likely released in the mid-1960s at the nearby Pu'u Wa'a Wa'a Ranch, where few observations were made during the late 1960s-early 1970s (see [Yellow-fronted Canary](#) and [Lavender Waxbill](#)). On 10 Mar 1973 a flock was seen at the same water tank as the specimen was found, they were found commonly breeding from Puako to N of Kawaihae in Mar-Apr 1974 (Berger 1975d), and they were observed and found "abundantly" around Pohakuloa SP in fall 1974 (*E* 35:55, 38:100). In Feb 1978 several hundred were seen near Waikoloa and "hundreds if not thousands" were found near Hawi (*E* 39:20). In May-Jul 1978 Scott et al. (1986) found them in dry habitats on the slopes of Mt Hualalai and up to 3100 m elevation on Mauna Kea, estimating a population of 4,000 individuals within [HFBS](#) study areas. In Nov 1979 they were found at Keahou S of Kona (*E* 41:78), by Dec 1979 they had reached Bird Park in Volcano NP (*E* 41:78), and by Mar 1980 they were observed at South Point (*E* 41:78). Through the 2000s they remained common through these areas on the leeward side of Hawai'i, with numbers perhaps dropping some after the high counts of the 1970s. Berger (1975d) diagnoses birds on Hawai'i I as nominate *L.c. cantans* of w. and c. Africa as opposed to *orientalis* of e. Africa, and specimen examination by PP corroborates this.

On *Maui*, a Warbling Silverbill was tentatively identified at Kanaha Pond in Sep 1978 and a flock of 40 was found near Ulupalakua 23 Dec 1978 (*E* 39:89-90). A year later they had "increased enormously" and had been recorded from Kihei and Kula to Hana (*E* 40:139-140). During the 1980-2000s they were observed commonly in dry habitats throughout W and S Maui, on Molokini Islet (15 on 2 Apr 1983), and at Hosmer Grove at an elevation over 2100 m. The next island on which Warbling Silverbills were observed was *Lana'i*, where 4 found at Halepalaoa Landing 24 Aug 1979 were believed

to have arrived from Maui in the past year (Hirai 1980). Observations of small to moderate numbers on Lana'i continued during sporadic coverage through the 2000s. On *Kaho'olawe* eight observed 8-10 Aug 1980, including four flying out over the ocean toward Molokini and Maui, were undoubtedly part of the same natural expansion northwestward through the Hawaiian Islands (Conant 1983a). They have since been recorded as "common" or in small numbers during most or all visits to this island (e.g., Gon et al. 1992, Morin et al. 1998), including a nest observed by Morin et al. in 1996 or 1997. The first observation from *Moloka'i* was of a second-hand report from an unknown locality in Jun-Jul 1980, and the first verified report came from Kepuhi Bay on the w. end of the island 2 Oct 1981 (*AB* 36:223). Through the 2000s they were considered common throughout w. Moloka'i and were observed to at least 6 km E of Kaunakakai.

Conant (1984) recorded the first African Silverbills on *O'ahu* near Sandy Beach SP 4 and 13 Feb 1984, and received word from a hiker that he had seen them in the area for several months prior to this. The next observations were not until 1986, when they turned up in Nanakuli (Jul), Koko Head (Sep), and Diamond Head (Nov). Through the 2000s they were observed in comparatively small numbers along the s. coastline of O'ahu, from the Mokapu Peninsula around to Kaena Point, with a high count of 30 noted at Nanakuli 10 Aug 2001 and 40 at Kaena Point 13 Nov 2008. Through 2007 they were recorded only 7 times on the Honolulu Christmas Count (see p. XXX; during 1985-2001), with a high count of 10 recorded during the expansion phase in 1985. The first reports from *Kaua'i* were of a small flock in the vicinity of Poipu 8 Jan 1984 (*E* 45:117) and flocks of 10-20 in the Mana Plain W of Kekaha. The following winter 16 were recorded on the Lihue Christmas Count 15 Dec 1984 (*E* 45:102). Through the 2000s they have been observed in small flocks along the S side of the island, from Barking Sands Beach to Lihue and rarely N to Kapa'a (Denny 1999). They have been recorded seven times on the Waimea Count (1998-2006, high count 20 in 2003), and once each on the Lihue (above) and Kapa'a (2 in 2001) counts. African Silverbills have also reached *Ni'ihau*, where up to 25 were recorded on Lehua Islet in Aug 2009, including four observed flying back to the main island, and we consider them established here as on Kaua'i.

[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/>