

‘AKIAPOLA’AU

Hemignathus wilsoni

Other: Hawai'i Nukupu'u

monotypic

native resident, endemic, endangered

The 'Akiapola'au is endemic to *Hawai'i I*, where in the 1990-2000s it persisted in small numbers in high-elevation forests (USFWS 1983d, 2006; Pratt et al. 2001). The AOU (1998) and other recent references refer to this species as *H. "munroi"* but if 'Amakihi's are removed from the genus *Hemignathus*, as we do here (see [Hawai'i 'Amakihi](#)), the name returns to the long-standing *wilsoni* (Olson and James 1995, AOU 1998, Pratt et al. 2001; see [Synonymies](#)). Peale (1848) was the first to write about the 'Akiapola'au, indicating (under the name "*Hemignathus? lucidus*", apparently separate from the O'ahu [Nukupuku](#); see [Synonymies](#)) that a specimen collected on Hawai'i in 1840-1841 was "too much mutilated to venture specific characters for it." Additional specimens collected in 1877 by Baillieu (see [Palila](#)) were apparently overlooked by early taxonomists (Banko 1984c, Olson and James 1994a). Wilson (1889b, 1890a) collected 14 specimens in 1887-1888 (Banko 1984c) but thought that they referred to Lafresnaye's (1839) "*olivaceus*", the O'ahu Nukupu'u. Rothschild took Wilson to task for this error (see Wilson and Evans 1899) but apparently later felt guilty and made up for it by naming the here-to-fore undescribed species *wilsoni* (Rothschild 1893g, 1900). The 'Akiapola'au was considered conspecific with the Nukupu'us by Bryan and Greenway (1944) and Munro (1944) but Amadon (1950) re-split it based on its unique lower mandible shape. See [Synonymies](#) for a taxonomic history. There are no subfossil records of 'Akiapola'au from any other Hawaiian island (James and Olson 1991, 2003).

Early collectors (Wilson and Evans 1899; Rothschild 1900; Perkins 1893, 1903; Munro 1944) considered the 'Akiapola'au to be common and widespread on Hawai'i during 1887-1896, but by 1898-1901 Henshaw (1902a) noted that they were generally rare and only locally "rather common". Never-the-less, over 150 specimens were secured during this period, including 74 by Henshaw (Banko 1979, 1984c). They were found as low as 600 m above Hilo but primarily at 1000-1700 m elevation on the slopes of all three volcanoes.

The next reports of 'Akiapola'au did not occur until 1937 (*E* 11:62-65), after which numerous observations through the 1970s indicated a steady decline in range and numbers (Berger 1972, 1981; Banko 1984c, Scott et al. 1986). It was listed as endangered by the USFWS in 1967 and by the State of Hawaii in 1982 (USFWS 1982c, 1983d, 2006). They were observed fairly commonly in Hawaii Volcanoes NP in the 1940s-1950s (e.g., Baldwin 1953, Richards and Baldwin 1953) but the last report there was in the late 1950s (Dunmire 1961, 1962; Conant 1976; Scott et al. 1986). However, they remain fairly common in the Kilauea Forest Reserve upslope of the NP (Jacobi 1974, Pratt et al. 1977), perhaps showing decadal cycles (higher population sizes in the 1970s and 1990s than in the 1980s and 2000s) and a marginally significant decline there according to Volcano [Christmas Count](#) data ([Graph](#)). The last observation on Hualalai was in 1971 (*E* 34:3) and a report from the Kohala Mts that same year (*E* 34:1) is problematic (see [Nukupuku](#)).

In the late 1970s the island-wide population had been reduced to about 1500 birds in four fragmented populations in Koa forests at 1000-2100 m elevation above Hamakua, Kau, and Kona, and in dry forests at 2000-2900 m elevation around the S side of Mauna Kea), according to [HFBS](#) data (Scott et al. 1986). Clearing of land and grazing by ungulates were thought to be primary causes of population decline (Scott and Kepler 1985), and reforestation was recommended to manage populations (Scott et al., 1985). By 1990-1995 these populations had been estimated at about 1200 individuals, with the largest drops occurring above Kau (from 500 to 44) and in the dry Mauna Kea habitats (from about 50 to probably extirpated by 2004; Fancy et al. 1996, Pratt et al. 2001, Gorresen et al. 2009). In 2005, however, the Kau population was estimated at ± 1000 birds and the overall population at 2100 birds (USFWS 2006, Pratt et al. 2009b), indicating increases at higher elevations but decreases at lower elevations (Camp et al. 2009), highly fluctuating occurrence patterns (*cf.* Pratt et al. 1977, Scott et al. 1986, Camp et al. *in* Gorresen et al. 2009; [Graph](#)), and/or perhaps inconsistent surveying techniques (*cf.* Pratt et al. 2001). Restoration and management of koa (*Acacia*) trees in the Kau area during late 2000s could help increase the numbers of this population (Pratt et al. 2009a, 2009b), and a captive breeding program (based on capture of adults because eggs would be too difficult to safely collect) might also help (Lieberman and Kuehler 2009).

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

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