

LESSER KOA-FINCH

Rhodacanthis flaviceps

Other: Yellow-headed Koa-Finch

monotypic

native resident, endemic, extinct

The Lesser Koa Finch is one of three species of finch-billed honeycreepers collected on the slopes above Captain Cook, *Hawai'i I*, in the late 1800s and not credibly recorded after the turn of the 19th century (Grant 1995, Olson 1999b, Pratt 2005). In Sep-Oct 1891, Palmer and Munro collected 24 koa-finches in the Pu'u Lehua area, at 1,400-1,500 m elevation on the sw. slopes of Hualalai (Munro 1944; Banko 1979, 1986). Later, the collectors were surprised to learn that this series contained two species described by Rothschild (1892); eight specimens were designated as Lesser Koa-Finches and 16 as [Greater Koa-Finches](#). Perkins (1903), Newton (in Evenhuis 2007:238, 315), Munro (1944), and others later disputed the existence of the Lesser Koa-Finch as simply variants or juveniles of Greater Koa-Finches, but its validity has been confirmed by taxonomists comparing specimens of the two species (Wilson and Evans 1899, Amadon 1950, James and Olson 1991, Grant 1994, Olson 1999b, James and Price 2008). See [Greater Koa-Finch](#) and [Synonymies](#) for information on *Rhodacanthis* taxonomy, distribution, and ecology.

Aside from these eight specimens (6 at AMNH and 2 at BMNH), all apparently taken among Greater Koa-Finches 30 Sep-16 Oct 1891 (Perkins 1903, Munro 1944, Banko 1986, Olson 1999b), nothing more is known about the Lesser Koa-Finch. Perkins (1893, 1903) was aware of both species but in closely observing and collecting "some hundreds" of [Greater Koa-Finches](#) in 1892-1896, he failed to detect a Lesser Koa-Finch. Subsequent observers (Henshaw 1902a, Amadon 1950, Richards & Baldwin 1953, Banko 1986; *E* 27:54-55), also failed to locate koa-finches in the vicinity of Pu'u Lehua (see also *E* 27:112-113), and it appears that the Lesser Koa-Finch went extinct without a single observer appreciating it as a live species in the wild.

[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/>