

NIHOA FINCH

Telespiza ultima

native resident, endemic, endangered

monotypic

The Nihoa Finch is endemic to *Nihoa* in the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands* (Morin and Conant 2002, Pratt 2005). Nihoa's rocky coastline prevented early naturalists from landing (during moderate to high swell conditions) and discovering this bird in the 1800s (Bryan 1916, Munro 2007), although Dole noted its presence 22 Jul 1885 after landing on a calm day for a picnic (Munro 1944, Clapp et al. 1977), and the botanist Albert Jaeger captured one by hand in 1892 and brought it to Honolulu (Perkins 1913, in Evenhuis 2007:69-70). Perkins (1913) mistakenly thought this was Wilson's [Laysan Finch](#) or he undoubtedly would have pursued the issue further with Jaeger. Munter (1915) succeeded in landing 18 Mar 1915 and was the first to collect scientific specimens (5), which were described by Bryan (1917) as *ultima*, mistakenly the "last native passerine bird to be discovered in the Hawaiian group" (see [Millerbird](#) and [Po'ouli](#)). See [Laysan Finch](#) and [Synonymies](#) for a taxonomic history of *Telespiza*, considered synonymous with *Psittirostra* or *Loxoides* and/or a monotypic genus with two subspecies by some taxonomists. At least 68 more specimens have since been collected (Clapp et al. 1977, Banko 1979). After early population estimates of 500-1000 individuals (Munter 1915, Vanderbuilt and de Schauensee 1941, Richardson 1954b, Clapp et al. 1977), estimates based on transect counts made by USFWS and other personnel from 1964 to 1996 varied from 946 to 6,686 birds with a mean of 3177 individuals (Clapp et al. 1977, Conant et al. 1981, USFWS 1984c, Evenhuis and Eldredge 2001, Rauzon 2001, Morin and Conant 2002, Gorresen et al. 2009). Nihoa Finches have also been identified in the subfossil record of Moloka'i (James and Olson 1991; see also [Laysan Finch](#)).

On 10 Mar 1967, 42 Nihoa Finches were released "for insurance" at French Frigate, 32 on Tern I and 10 on Whale Skate (Sincock and Kridler 1977, USFWS 1984c, Morin and Conant 2002). Two observed on Whale 12 Mar were the last recorded there (Amerson 1971), and the Tern population quickly dwindled to a small breeding population of 6-8 birds from 1968 to 1974, after which it extinguished (*E* 34:59, 37:107, Sincock and Kridler 1977, USFWS 1984c, Scott and Kepler 1985). Berger (1972, 1981) kept several in Honolulu for at least five years (1969-1974) and was successful in propagating the species, and propagation and translocation are being considered for the future (Pratt et al. 2009a).

[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/>