

ISLAND CANARY

Serinus canaria

Other: Canary (< 1979), Common Canary (1980-2012),
Domestic Canary

monotypic

naturalized (non-native) resident, long established

The Island Canary is a monotypic species resident to the Madeira, Azore, and w. Canary Is (Cramp and Perrins 1994a, AOU 1998). Establishment of this well-known cage bird has been attempted in various places around the world, but only at *Midway, Northwestern Hawaiian Islands*, have they become successfully established (Long 1981, Lever 1987, AOU 1998). Attempts to establish it in Southeastern Hawaiian Islands were not successful (Bryan 1941). Native populations are dull yellow to whitish streaked brown, but they have been selectively bred by aviculturists to appear uniformly pale yellow, with orange and red variants. Midway birds are comprised largely of the pale-yellow variety, although occasional genetic throwbacks with streaks are also observed, and bleaching has resulted in reports in summer of nearly white birds.

The Midway population can be traced back to a pair brought from Honolulu (via China) by Cable Company employees in Mar 1909, which produced 11 young in Feb-Apr 1910; these 13 birds were released in Jul 1910 along with two more males brought from Honolulu (Bryan 1912, Munro 1944, Bailey 1956; *E* 3:22, 4:52, 5:48, 6:14). With supplemental feeding by residents and without predators (some "very troublesome" cats were removed by May 1910 for the sake of the canaries), the released population expanded rapidly, reaching 60 birds by 1911 (Bryan 1912, *E* 6:14). By 1922-1923 the population was estimated at 1000 individuals (Fisher 1949, Wetmore *in* Olson 1996b) and in 1943 it was estimated to be about 500, but the introduction of rats that year had a severe effect on all birdlife at Midway, and the canary population had declined to the point where they were thought possibly extirpated by Oct 1944 (*E* 5:50, 6:12). However, small numbers were able to survive the presence of rats, perhaps due to the maturing of the *Casaurina* trees where they could nest high up in smaller branches, out of harms way (Fisher and Baldwin 1946, Bailey 1956). Estimates during rat presence on Midway include 30 in Jun 1945 (Fisher and Baldwin 1946; *E* 6:14), 75 in Dec 1946 (Fisher 1949), up to 50 in May-Jun 1949 (Bailey 1956, *E* 10:18), two dozen or more in 1956-1957 (*E* 18:4), 73 in Jul 1978 (*E* 39:76), 200-400 in Nov 1979-Mar 1980 (Grant and Petit 1981), and from as few as 5 to as many as 60 between 1981 and 1998 (e.g., *E* 41:119, 43:3; cf. [HRBP](#) 0230). It was also reported that additional individuals had been brought to Midway and released from time to time in or before 1971 (*E* 32:78).

Following removal of rats in 1997-1998, the Island Canary population increased rapidly again, resulting in tallies of 572-1823 on [Christmas Bird Counts](#) during 1999-2005 (e.g., *E* 60:86; 61:75, 81; 62:124) and a high counts of 3000+ in Aug 1999 and of 2563 during a USFWS survey of them on 21 Jun 2001. During 2010-2016 they continued to be seen abundantly on Midway, with as many as 675 counted on the 2011 [Christmas Count](#). Six specimens from Midway collected 1984-2002 are located at BPBM.

Sometime in early 1976 six were brought from Midway to Kure for release. Up to three birds were seen through Jan 1979 (Rauzon 1978; *E* 40:31) but were not reported thereafter. Another Island Canary of the pale-yellow variety showed up on *Kure* 25 Jul-7 Oct 2016 ([HRBP](#) 6764-6765). We assume that this bird originated from the Midway population, and that it reached Kure on its own accord.

Island Canaries from the Midway population also were reportedly transported to New York in 1911 (Bryan 1912) and to Wake I in 1935 (Rauzon et al. 2008). Free-flying Common Canaries have also been reported occasionally from Southeastern Islands but all disappeared shortly after being observed, perhaps due to the inability of domestic strains to adapt to uncaged life (Caum 1933).

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

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<http://hbs.bishopmuseum.org/birds/rlp-monograph/>