

LAVENDER WAXBILL

Estrilda caerulescens

Other: Lavender Fire-Finch (<1983), Lavender Finch

monotypic

naturalized (non-native) resident, recently established

This monotypic species of waxbill is found in W Africa from Senegal and Nigeria to sw. Chad and ne. Cameroon (AOU 1998). Around the world it has been introduced only to the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands* (Long 1981, Lever 1987), where small populations have persisted on O'ahu and Hawai'i I. Long (1981) cited confusion on the identity of birds introduced to Hawaii and referred to birds on O'ahu as the Black-tailed Waxbill (*E. perreini*), a species for which we know of no reports from Hawaii.

Kalodimos (2007) summarizes the history and status of Lavender Waxbill on O'ahu. The first mention of the species was for the Na Laau trail, w. slopes of Diamond Head, on the same date (15 Oct 1965) that many other finch-like species were first encountered there (*E* 26:53-54). Small numbers of Lavender Waxbills were observed there through 31 Dec 1967, when 17 were counted on the Honolulu [Christmas Bird Count](#), indicating expanding populations (*E* 28:67, 70). Numbers on the count increased to peak counts of 40 in 1972 (*E* 33:79, 84) and 30-50 in fall 1976 (*E* 38:5), after which they declined in the Diamond Head area during winter ([Graph](#)), coincident with cessation of neighborhood feeding there in 1978. During the 1980-2000s small and generally declining numbers were reported around Diamond Head in spring and summer months including 15 there in Jul 1981, dropping gradually to 7 in Apr 1989, the last report from this area. Meanwhile, increasing numbers were reported in the Aina Haina suburbs of se. O'ahu, beginning in Jul 1988, reaching high counts of 10-12 in 1992-1994, and ending in 1998 when they could not be located despite searches. No observations were made on O'ahu until 2005-2016, when small numbers were found again in upper Aina Haina and Wailupe Vallies (e.g., [HRBP](#) 5955), with a peak of 14 counted in Aina Haina in Aug 2006 (Kalodimos 2007), and extending as far N as Sandy Beach Park (20 Aug 2010) and as far W as Kaimuki (26 Sep 2012). They appear to persist in these areas but are difficult to detect. There are no other substantiated observations of Lavender Waxbills on O'ahu away from the se. sections of the island. Although Pyle (1992), AOU (1998), and Pyle and Pyle (2009) listed Lavender Waxbill for O'ahu, given their dwindling numbers and possibility of additional cage releases we no longer consider them as having been established on this island (see also [Orange-cheeked Waxbill](#) on O'ahu and [Black-rumped Waxbill](#) on Hawai'i I).

On *Hawai'i I* four individuals were first observed at the Pu'u Wa'a Wa'a ranch in Aug 1966 (Swedberg 1967a). Although lack of observer effort resulted in no reports for the next 12 years, by May 1978 they had apparently become established, with up to 10 individuals encountered on the slopes of the pu'u (Ashman and Pyle 1979) and a population estimate of 240 birds in the area during the [HFBS](#) survey (Scott et al. 1986). In the fall of 1979 they were first encountered in Kona, and numbers here and elsewhere gradually increased, with high counts of 20 at Pu'uana'hulu in Oct 1986, 49 on the North Kona [Christmas Count](#) 20 Dec 1992 (*E* 53:48), and 15 at Captain Cook in Jan 1995. The first reported nesting was observed in Kona in 2002. Records elsewhere on Hawai'i include Keauhou (beginning Jan 1988), Honaunau Park (beginning Jul 1991), Ho'okena

(beginning Mar 1992), Honokohau (beginning Jan 1997), and Hapuna Beach (7 Jul 2015). In 2010-2016 small numbers continued to be observed in most of these areas, and >10 were regularly counted at Kealahou Bay (high count of 20 there 17 Jan 2011), Captain Cook, and downtown Kailua Kona.

Small numbers of Lavender Waxbills were occasionally observed in the isthmus of Maui from 1989-1998, with a high count of 9 observed at Pu'unene in Jan 1995, but there were no reports during the 2000s. It is suspected that someone had released these and other species (*cf.* [Chestnut Munia](#)) on Maui during the late 1990s.

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

Citation: Pyle, R.L., and P. Pyle. 2017. The Birds of the Hawaiian Islands: Occurrence, History, Distribution, and Status. B.P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu, HI, U.S.A. Version 2 (1 January 2017) <http://hbs.bishopmuseum.org/birds/rlp-monograph/>