

LESSER 'AKIALOA

Akialoa obscura

Other: 'Akialoa (<1983), Hawaiian 'Akialoa (1983-1997)

monotypic

native resident, endemic, extinct

The 'akialoas represent four taxa that have variously been considered one, two, three, or four species (reviewed by Olson and James 1995, Lepson and Johnston 2000, Pratt 2005; see [Synonymies](#)). Many authors in the 20th century considered them four subspecies of one or two species within genus *Hemignathus*, often with the Kaua'i population split and the other three (on O'ahu, Lana'i, and Hawai'i I) lumped. But the AOU (1997) then split the Hawai'i population and lumped the other three populations, into Lesser 'Akialoa and Greater 'Akialoa, respectively. Based on additional evidence (Olson and James 1995; Pratt and Pratt 2001; James and Olson 2003; Pratt 2005, 2014), and some uncertainty, the AOU (2015) split all four populations into separate species and into genus *Akialoa*, retaining the name [Lesser 'Akialoa](#) for the Hawai'i population while recognizing the [O'ahu 'Akialoa](#), [Kaua'i 'Akialoa](#), and [Maui-nui 'Akialoa](#) as species. The 'akialoas apparently once dominated the forests of the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands* but quickly succumbed to anthropogenic pressures that accelerated during the 1800s and early 1900s. Including subfossil evidence, at least seven species of 'akialoas have been identified, with one to two taxa on each of the forested islands (Olson and James 1982b, James and Olson 1991, James 2004).

First post-contact mention of Lesser 'Akialoa was made by C. Clerke (*in* King 1779) during Cook's third voyage, as a bird that was "entirely green, with a tinge of yellow, and is called *akaiearooa*". Beaglehole (1967) mistook this passage as in reference to [Hawai'i 'Amakihi](#) (see Wilson 1977). King felt that this, the [Hawai'i 'O'o](#), and the [I'iwi](#) were in the same family of "honey-suckers". The first specimens were collected at the time (Cook and King 1784), while naturalists were on a several-day excursion inland from Kealakekua Bay, *Hawai'i I*, in Jan-Feb 1779, and these specimens were examined by Latham (1781-1785), who described the species as *Hemignathus obscurus*, the "Hook-billed green Creeper" (Gmelin 1789, Stresemann 1950, Medway 1981, Banko 1984c; [Synonymies](#)); Gray (1857) believed these early specimens to represent female I'iwis (Dole 1879). Reference by Cook to a "Green Dove" in the forests may also have been based on 'akialoas (Beaglehole 1967:630).

With the exception of Wilson (1890a; Wilson and Evans 1899), late 19th-century naturalists considered the Lesser 'Akialoa to be a common and widespread species in mid to upper-elevation (360-1,800 m) forests throughout Hawai'i I (Peale 1848; Rothschild 1900; Henshaw 1902a; Perkins 1903, *in* Evenhuis 2007:276; Munro 1944). By 1901, however, Henshaw (1902a) seemed to be noting declines in certain areas. Banko (1979) and Lepson and Johnston (2000) give information on some 115-120 specimens collected during this period, the last two, obtained by C.E. Blacow and L.E. Miller at Umikoa (315 elevation) along the n. Hamakua coast in Sep 1903, representing the last confirmed record of the Lesser 'Akialoa. We consider the report of a vocalization from the e. slope of Mauna Kea in 1940 (*E* 23:57; *cf.* Baldwin 1941) as unsubstantiated. Based on Poisson analyses of persistence probabilities using confirmed and unconfirmed records, Elphick

et al. (2009) estimated that the Lesser 'Akialoa went extinct in 1907, with an upper limit of 1915; see also Scott et al. (2008).

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

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