

LAYSAN HONEYCREEPER

Himatione fraithii

native resident, extinct

monotypic

The Laysan Honeyeater, now extirpated, was the only nectar-feeding Drepanine documented from the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands*. It was first noted by C. Isenbeck (*in von Kittlitz* 1834) on 3 Apr 1828, who recorded both a "red bird" and a hummingbird ("Colibri"), perhaps referring to Laysan Honeyeaters in both instances, in the second case due to its nectar-feeding habits. Palmer and Munro collected a series in June 1891 and Rothschild (1892a, 1900) named it in honor of George D. Freeth, armchair naturalist, superintendent of the guano company, and self-appointed "Governor of Laysan" at the time (Ely and Clapp 1973). However, Rothschild (1892a) mis-spelled his name as "*fraithii*" and later, attempting to mitigate his error, used four different spellings ("*fraithii*", "*fraithi*", "*freethi*", and "*freethii*") during the course of writing his monograph in 1893-1900 (Rothschild 1900); all four of these names have since been used by subsequent taxonomists ([Synonymies](#)). See Pyle (2011) for the proper use of "*fraithii*", which has since been adopted by the AOU (2015). Early ornithologists considered the Laysan population as a full species; Amadon (1950) and subsequent authors relegated it to a subspecies of 'Apapane (see [Synonymies](#)); but the AOU (2015), citing more-recent osteological and other evidence (Olson and James 1982b, James and Olson 1991, Olson and Ziegler 1995, Pratt and Pratt 2001, Pratt 2005), has given it full-species status again.

Laysan Honeycreepers were considered uncommon on Laysan by Isenbeck in 1828, and Palmer (*in* Rothschild 1900) claimed it was the rarest of the landbirds there, although he observed "a fair number". Palmer and subsequent collectors (including Shauninland *in* Rothschild 1900:305, Fisher 1903a, Dill and Bryan 1912, and Bailey 1956) secured at least 105 specimens between 1892 and 1913 (see Ely and Clapp 1973 and Banko 1979 for details). Dill and Bryan (1912) estimated a population size of 300 birds in 1911, and W.F. Coultas (*in* Ely and Clapp 1973) estimated 1,000 individuals in 1915. The well-documented decimation of Laysan's vegetation by European Hares in 1903-1923 (Ely and Clapp 1973; see [Laysan Rail](#)) resulted in the extirpation of the Laysan Honeyeater. The last three individuals apparently perished along with other taxa in a "three-day gale" on 18-20 Apr 1923 "that enveloped everything in a cloud of swirling sand" (Wetmore *in* Olson 1996b; see also Rauzon 2001).

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

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