



Hawaii 2023 Trip Report

[Link: Hawaii 2023 Trip Report](#)

Hawaii 2023 Trip Report

Oahu

For our only full day on Oahu, we do a big lap around the island hitting the key sites for the endemics and various species tricky to find elsewhere in Hawaii.



Birding in Oahu © Amy Rangel

We begin with an early hike on the Aiea Loop Trail in Keaiwa Heiau State Recreation Area, one of the more convenient locations to find Oahu's two remaining endemics: **Oahu Elepaio** and **Oahu Amakihi**. Having found a pair building a nest the previous day, our search for the Elepaio is easier than usual.



Aiea Loop Trail © Jakob Dulisse



Oahu Elepaio on nest © Amy Rangel

The nest is nearly complete as we observe an adult using its chest to shape the cup, and though the nest is not far from a constant parade of dog walkers, trail runners and hikers, we keep moving to avoid disturbing the pair. Throughout our walk, we hear and catch fleeting glimpses of Oahu Amakihi which are hiding in the canopy for the most part. When we hit our turnaround point which has the first flowering Ohia, we get better looks at a few birds that venture down to feed on the bright red blossoms. Next, we lunch at the food trucks along the North Shore for poke, shrimp tacos and more. We then visit the Kahuku Golf Course for **Bristle-thighed Curlews**, and La'ie Point State Wayside for seabirds, namely Brown Noddy and Sooty Tern.



Bristle-thighed Curlew © Amy Rangel

We finish the day with a long scenic drive back to the hotel with a quick stop for Tropicbirds along the island's south shore. Before our flight to Kauai, we spent our last morning on Oahu enjoying some relaxed birding with a stroll through Kapi'olani Regional Park near Waikiki Beach with **White Tern** being our main target.



Kapi'olani Regional Park © Jakob Dulisse



Red-ringed Parakeet © Jakob Dulisse



White Tern © Chris Burney

Kauai

We hit the ground running on Kauai with an afternoon walk to the lighthouse at Ninini Point, picking up **Red Avadavat** and **Pueo** (Hawaiian Short-eared Owl) near the airport in Lihue, and our first of many **Nene** (Hawaiian Goose) for the trip.



Short-eared Owl at airport © Amy Rangel



Nene © Chris Burney



Ninini Point © Jakob Dulisse

Our first full day on Kauai started out with non-bird targets, the **Hawaiian Monk Seal** and **Honu (Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle)** which we quickly found at Poipu Beach.



Monk Seal © Chris Burney



Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle © Chris Burney

We then continued along the southern shore of Kauai to Kawaiie State Waterbird Sanctuary briefly stopping for an accommodating **Brown Booby** along the way. At the Sanctuary, we experienced our first (and last!) rain shower of the tour, and only managed a few new shorebirds at the site. Nearby though, when the rain gave us a window, we had amazing views of one of the more stunning introduced gamebirds, the Black Francolin.



Brown Booby © Chris Burney

For our second full day on Kauai, we explored the north side of the island. First stop was for gorgeous scenery, **Opaekaa Falls** and an overlook of the **Wailua River Valley**. We then tried our luck with Greater Necklaced Laughingthrushes on the Kuamo'o Nounou Trail but came up empty.



Opaekaa Falls © Jakob Dulisse



Wailua River Valley © Amy Rangel

Our main attraction for this day is **Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge**, and we had fantastic weather to watch the endless parade of whales, albatross, boobies, and tropicbirds passing the lighthouse. Thankfully, a few **Wedge-tailed Shearwaters** had recently returned to nest, and we had amazing views of a pair courting outside their burrow.



Kilauea Point Lighthouse, Kauai © Chris Burney



Wedge-tailed Shearwaters © Chris Burney



Red-tailed-Tropicbird © Amy Rangel



White-tailed-Tropicbird © Amy Rangel



Laysan Albatross © Jakob Dulisse



White-rumped Shama © Jakob Dulisse

After an amazing lunch with fresh ono (wahoo) tacos and burritos, we took a break at Anini Beach to get some time in the water. Our last stop for the day was Hanalei National Wildlife Refuge to view most of Hawaii's endemic waterbirds. For our third and last full day on Kauai, we climbed into the deeper sections of Koke'e State Park to look for the native forest birds still holding on atop the Alakai Plateau of Kauai's northwestern highlands.



Kauai © Chris Burney

Weather is hard to predict in one of the world's wettest spots, but we get lucky again, with mostly

clear skies up high. Eventually, we make it to the ridgeline on the Pihea Trail that is still loaded with Ohia and native Lobelias - prime nectar sources for Hawaiian honeycreepers, and by working this area repeatedly, we eventually get great looks at our main targets: **Anianiau, Apapane, Kauai Amakihi and Kauai Elepaio.**



Pihea Trail © Jakob Dulisse



Anianiau © Amy Rangel



Kauai Elepaio © Amy Rangel

After a relaxing picnic lunch in the park, we make our way back to the hotel in Lihue with a quick stop for the **Gray-tailed Tattler** at Salt Ponds Beach.



Gray-tailed Tattler © Amy Rangel



Going over the bird checklist in the evening © Amy Rangel

Big Island

We start our journey around the Big Island from Hilo with our first two nights near Volcanoes National Park. Our first full day is a tour of the park with a pair of local guides that give us a thorough introduction to the geological history, processes and features that continue to transform the surrounding landscape.



Volcanoes National Park © Chris Burney



Volcano National Park © Jakob Dulisse

After brunch along the rim of Kilauea Crater, we fit in some birding with stops for Hawaiian Black Noddy along the sea cliffs and Omao at Thurston Lava Tube. Our next full day is spent driving around the southern end of the island to the Kona side. We start the morning back in Volcanoes National Park at Kipuka Puaulu (Kipukas are patches of forest that remain after a lava flow, and essentially become islands for plants and animals), where we look for native birds, plants and butterflies. We find **Hawaii Elepaio**, a confiding **Omao** finally and Blackburn's Blue Butterfly. We eat lunch at the southernmost restaurant in the United States, and have a nice gelato break before getting to our hotel in Kona. In the afternoon, we birded the Kealakehe Wastewater Treatment Plant and wracked up our best bird list of the trip, notables include Cackling Goose, Least Tern, Snowy Egret, Eurasian Wigeon, White-faced Ibis and much more.



Kealakehe Wastewater Treatment Plant © Jakob Dulisse

For the penultimate day of the tour we went with Hawaii Forest & Trail to Hakalau National Wildlife Refuge. Hakalau (meaning “many perches”) NWR was the first refuge created specifically for songbirds, and is one of the few places in Hawaii with a relatively intact native avifauna.



Hakalau © Jakob Dulisse

Once again, the weather is perfect during our visit and we end up seeing at least four **Akiapolaau!** Other notables are **Hawaii Akepa, Alawi (Hawaii Creeper), Iiwi, Apapane, Omao, Hawaii Elepaio,** and **Nene.**



Akiapolaau © Amy Rangel



Akiapolaau © Chris Burney



Hawaii Akepa © Amy Rangel



Hawaii Creeper © Amy Rangel



Iiwi © Amy Rangel



Apapane © Amy Rangel

Our last day is mostly spent in the dry forests on the slopes of Mauna Kea. These forests are dominated by Mamane and Naio, and the fruits and flowers of these trees are an important food for the critically endangered **Palila**, our main target for the day. We quickly find a bird on the Palila Discovery Trail that provides excellent views, but only briefly before it flies high and away.



Birding on the Big Island © Amy Rangel

Having struck out on **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse** in the morning, we made another effort in the same area before lunch, and this time got very lucky with exceptional views of a flock that nearly flew into us and several birds on the fields below us at close range - an excellent way to end our trip.



Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse © Amy Rangel



Our birding group, Volcanoes National Park Tour