Eagle-Eye Tours



Hawaii Trip Report 2025

Link: Hawaii Trip Report 2025

Eagle-Eye Tours ventured to Hawaii to experience the islands' array of birds, wildlife, and stunning scenery. Covering everything from beaches with endangered Hawaiian Monk Seals, to high-altitude forests with a diverse assortment of endemic honeycreepers, to active volcanoes, there was never a dull moment. Hawaii is a special place known both for its large number of endangered and endemic birds and for the numerous exotic species introduced from around the world. This tour visited three islands from March 9th to the 20th: Oahu, Kauai, and Hawaii (The Big Island).



The group at the Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge on Kauai © Jeff Turner

OAHU

We began on the island of Oahu with a morning hike in the high country above Honolulu seeking out two island endemics, the Oahu Amakihi and the endangered Oahu Elepaio. The increasingly difficult to find Oahu Elepaio would elude us, but as soon as we began seeing the red blossoms of the native 'ohi'a trees favored by many of the native Hawaiian honeycreeper species, we started seeing Oahu Amakihis feeding at them with their delicately curved bills. Along the way we were treated to great views of two colorful introduced species, Red-crested Cardinal and White-rumped Shama.



Aiea Loop Trail © Jeff Turner



Oahu Amakihi © Jeff Turner

We then headed to the coast seeking out waterbirds. After enjoying lunch from a diverse assemblage of food trucks on the west shore of the island, we ventured to the edge of an oceanside golf course where we got great looks at Bristle-thighed Curlews tamely foraging on the greens while Laysan Albatrosses made repeated passes over our heads!



Bristle-thighed Curlew © Louie Dombroski



Laysan Albatross © Jeff Turner

In addition to several Red-footed Boobies spotted flying over the ocean we saw a Brown Booby and the rarest of Hawaii's regular booby species, a Masked Booby. This stop also turned up one of the rarest birds of the trip, a vagrant Black-bellied Plover that almost evaded detection.
On our last morning on Oahu, we familiarized ourselves with some introduced species near our hotel, such as Spotted and Zebra Doves, Rose-ringed Parakeets, and both Red-vented and Red-whiskered Bulbuls. We sought out White Terns, a native species that has taken to nesting in trees between the skyscrapers in downtown Honolulu. We saw several of these dainty birds and were even treated to the sight of an adult feeding a small chick on a tree branch above our heads!



White Tern nest trees © Jeff Turner

The White Terns nests are easy to locate in downtown Honolulu as the trees are clearly marked by officials. Their "nests" consist of a single egg laid on a bare branch (Jeff Turner).

KAUAI

Traveling to Kauai, our main birding targets were the Hawaiian Goose and the Hawaiian Duck. They were not hard to find with flocks sometimes numbering over a dozen including family groups and goslings. A long-staying Snow Goose accompanied one such flock. Most of the ducks across Hawaii are Hawaiian Duck x Mallard hybrids, but a population of pure Hawaiian Ducks can still be found on Kauai.



Hawaiian Geese © Jeff Turner



Snow Goose © Jeff Turner

This vagrant Snow Goose has made Kauai its home for several years (Jeff Turner).
The variety of species on Kauai was remarkable. We were privileged to see nesting Laysan Albatrosses including both the stately adults and their more ungainly looking chicks.



Laysan Albatross chick © Jeff Turner

While stopped at a scenic turnoff to view a waterfall, we were treated to extended views of a hunting Pueo, or Hawaiian Short-eared Owl. Both Chestnut and Scaly-breasted Munias showed up along the roadsides, and we saw our first Java Sparrows trying to hide amongst House Sparrows in an athletic field.

A highlight of our time on Kauai was birding from the overlook at Kilauea National Wildlife Refuge, where we especially enjoyed the sight of numerous Red-footed Boobies as they flew by, red feet splayed as they landed in trees where they were building their nests. Laysan Albatrosses flew by occasionally as did Great Frigatebirds and both White-tailed and Red-tailed Tropicbirds. To add to the surreal nature of this experience, we were serenaded by the songs of Northern Cardinal, House Finch and Western Meadowlark, all of which have been introduced from North America.



Red-tailed Tropicbird © Jeff Turner

We drove through Hanalei National Wildlife Refuge, where planted taro fields in varying stages of rotation have created habitat for all of Hawaii's marsh-nesting waterbirds, including the endemic Hawaiian Duck and Hawaiian Coot, and the Hawaiian subspecies of Common Gallinule and Black-necked Stilt. A sleepy male Green-winged Teal, an uncommon winter visitor to Hawaii, showed itself well enough for us to determine that it was of the Eurasian subspecies formerly considered a separate species known as Common Teal.



The taro fields at Hanalei National Wildlife Refuge © Jeff Turner

We ventured into the forested high country of Koke'e State Park one morning. On the drive up, we got looks from the vehicles at Black Francolin and Erckel's Spurfowl along the road. We took in phenomenal views of cliffs rising out of the ocean 4,000 feet below, with occasional White-tailed Tropicbirds punctuating the scene on our surprisingly sunny visit to what is one of the wettest spots of the planet.



A view of the Kalalau Valley and the recognizable Na Pali coast from the top of Koke'e State Park on Kauai © Jeff Turner



Waimea Canyon, known as the Grand Canyon of the Pacific, is up to 3,000 feet deep © Jeff Turner

Here we found lots of Apapanes, the most common and widespread of the red-plumaged honeycreepers. We had fantastic looks at several Kauai Elepaios, which lived up to their reputation for being curious and friendly. Most of the endemic birds on Kauai are being severely impacted by the advance of mosquitoes carrying avian malaria farther up the mountains. The birds have no

defense against the virus and many populations are crashing. We were happy to get to see the Elepaio and Apapane, which have more stable populations on the island. We heard the explosive songs of Japanese Bush-Warblers but were unable to obtain any views of this secretive, introduced species.



Kauai Eleapio © Steven Shaddix

We visited the Kawai'ele State Waterbird Sanctuary, where Hawaiian Coots and the Hawaiian race of the Black-necked Stilts were especially numerous. Among the typical "white-shielded" Hawaiian Coots was one of the rarer "red-shielded" forms. We located an uncommon White-faced Ibis that had been wintering here and found a Long-billed Dowitcher among the Ruddy Turnstones and Pacific Golden-Plovers on the mudflats. Also seen here were African Silverbills and Common Waxbills.



Our group at Kawaiele State Waterbird Sanctuary © Jeff Turner

We had picnic lunches at a few beach parks on Kauai, during which we were able to see swimming Hawaiian Green Sea Turtles, spouting Pacific Humpback Whales, and lounging Hawaiian Monk Seals.



These endangered and endemic Hawaiian Monk Seals lounged on the beach during our lunch © Louie Dombroski



Hawaiian Monk Seal © Jeff Turner



A view of the stunning mountains on Kauai from the Menehune Fish Ponds near our hotel © Jeff Turner

We ended our time on Kauai with an evening seawatch. We counted over 30 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters along with Brown and Red-footed Boobies. The real highlight though, was jumping out of the van when a pair of Chinese Hwamei flew across the road.



We found Brown and Red-footed Boobies and numerous Wedge-tailed Shearwaters during our evening seawatch at the Nawiliwili Lighthouse © Jeff Turner



A pair of usually elusive Chinese Hwamai sang and posed for all to see © Steven Shaddix

HAWAII (THE BIG ISLAND)

Upon arriving on the Big Island, we had time for an afternoon trip to search for a flock of Red Avadavats reported at an unassuming parking lot along the way to our hotel. Some birders had

arrived before us and located the flock, and we all enjoyed our looks at these tiny colorful finch-like birds.

We began our exploration of the Big Island with a tour of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, accompanied by a knowledgeable local guide from Kilauea Ecotours. He gave us a thorough introduction to the geological history of the park and its plant life as a light rain fell upon us for most of the day. We viewed the smoldering Kilauea crater from several vantage points and walked through the fascinating Thurston Lava Tube.



Chain of Craters Road in Volcanoes National Park © Jeff Turner



The active volcanic vent on Kilauea © Jeff Turner



The group entering Nahuku - Thurston Lava Tube © Jeff Turner

Having heard an Omao, a somber-colored yet attractive endemic thrush during the tour, we returned in the afternoon and all got to lay eyes on this enigmatic species, as well as obtaining our first looks at Hawaii Amakihis, undeterred by the light drizzle that continued to fall. Later in the afternoon and again the next morning we hiked a trail through a kipuka (an isolated patch of forest spared by a lava flow, resulting in an island for native plants and animals), getting repeated looks at numerous Apapanes, and some got great looks at a perched dark morph Hawaiian Hawk.



Dark morph Hawaiian Hawk © Jeff Turner



We had fresh papaya boats and banana bread every morning in Volcano © Jeff Turner

After two nights at the Volcano Inn, where the papaya boat and banana bread breakfast was a big hit, we moved to the town of Kona, stopping at a seaside park along the way where we had great views of Hawaiian Black Noddies flying in and out of their nest sites nestled into an oceanside cliff. We ate lunch at a nearby bakery, where a tame Yellow-billed Cardinal visited us looking for crumbs. We took a slight detour to catch a glimpse of a rare, wintering Pied-billed Grebe at a golf course pond on the way to Kona.



The rainforest of Volcanoes National Park © Jeff Turner



A flowering 'Ohi'a lehua blossom. These trees grow on bare lava. © Jeff Turner



Our lunch was interrupted by our first looks at Yellow-billed Cardinals © Jeff Turner

From our base in Kona we ventured to access-restricted Hakalau National Wildlife Refuge with an excellent local guide from Hawaii Forest and Trail. Degraded farmlands have been replanted with thousands of native trees to create a forest for the native birds, including the six species of

honeycreepers we saw here. The most numerous of these were the now familiar Apapane and the Hawaii Amakihi. We saw several individuals of a species similar to the Amakihi but smaller and with a less curved bill: the Alawi. Formerly called Hawaii Creeper, this species forages primarily on trunks and larger branches of native koa trees in much the manner of a Brown Creeper or nuthatch. One fairly common species here was the Iiwi, a bright scarlet and black bird with bright orange legs and a distinctive bright orange sickle-shaped bill it uses to feed on the blossoms of the endangered lobelia plant. We also had great looks at a few orange-hued Hawaii Akepas. This small honeycreeper has a nearly straight bill with the mandibles slightly crossed at the tip, which it uses to pry open leaf buds to find small insects.



The group birding at Hakalau Forest NWR © Jeff Turner



What better way to appreciate the rare forest on Mauna Kea than by hugging an 'Ohi'a lehua tree estimated to be more than 800 years old! © Louie Dombroski



The stunningly orange Hawaii Akepa gave extended views © Steven Shaddix

The rarest and most sought after of the honeycreepers here is the Akiapolaau, with its uniquely shaped bill consisting of a straight chisel-like lower mandible and a long, strongly down-curved upper mandible. It opens its beak wide and hammers like a woodpecker with its lower mandible, then reaches into the cavity thus created with its upper mandible to gather the beetle larva on which

it feeds. We were delighted to find a beautiful, bright, yellow-plumaged male of this endangered species at close range and all got to watch it forage for several minutes before it moved on. All also got great looks at Omaos, the endemic thrush we struggled to see in the rain at Volcanoes National Park. As we were preparing to leave the Refuge, a Hawaiian Hawk, our fourth for the tour, made a brief appearance.



This beautiful male Akiapolaau posed for the group © Steven Shaddix



We saw both endemic butterflies in the forest, including this Kamehameha Lady © Jeff Turner

Our final full day of the tour started with a trip to a sewage pond just a few minutes from Kona. We saw a few new duck species here including Blue-winged Teal and Northern Pintail, and got great looks at many shorebirds including Ruddy Turnstones, Wandering Tattlers and Pacific Golden-Plovers. Some of these plovers had acquired near full breeding plumage with black and white undersides contrasting with golden-spangled upperparts. We then headed to nearby Aimakapa Pond, where a mixed flock of diving ducks awaited us. A previously reported female Canvasback was there with the flock of Lesser Scaup and Ring-necked Ducks. We had hoped for a male Tufted Duck, which stayed the winter here, but he departed the previous week. On our walk back along the beach, the Hawaiian Green Sea Turtles hauled up on the lava beach were a great consolation prize. In addition, we had a pod of Spinner Dolphins jumping out of the water and a pair of Humpback Whales spouting and "fluking", or showing their flukes before diving.



Green Sea Turtle © Jeff Turner



Pacific Golden-Plover © Jeff Turner

We spent the afternoon in and around the town of Waikoloa, where we had great looks at Rosy-faced Lovebirds, Gray Francolins (including adults with small chicks), Eurasian Skylarks, Saffron Finches, and a highlight for all, a cooperative pair of Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse foraging along the road as we were departing. We returned to Aimakapa Pond where we got great evening-light looks at Yellow-billed Cardinals, Warbling White-eyes and Yellow-fronted Canaries for a relaxing last birding stop of the tour.



Our last lunch together © Louie Dombroski



It may look like we are stretching our legs, but there is no better place to enjoy nesting Rosy-faced Lovebirds than at this gas station! © Louie Dombroski



A pair of cooperative Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse was a nice finale to the trip © Steven Shaddix



One of the most common and beautiful birds of the trip, a Warbling White-eye © Jeff Turner

We ended the tour with 83 species of birds plus 3 exotic species, and 1 hybrid duck. A full eBird trip report can be found here: Hawaii birding tour species list 2025.

Mammals (8 species):

- Hawaiian Monk Seal (*Monachus schauinslandi*) - Endemic
- Spinner Dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*)
- Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)
- Indian Mongoose (*Herpestes auropunctatus*)
- Domestic Cattle (Feral) (*Bos taurus*)
- Wild Boar (Feral Pig) (*Sus scrofa*)
- Domestic Goat (*Capra hircus*)
- Mouflon Sheep (Hybrid) (*Ovis gmelini* x *Ovix sp.*)

Other wildlife (13 species):

- Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*)
- Pond Slider (*Trachemys scripta*)
- Common House Gecko (*Hemidactylus frenatus*)
- Green Anole (*Anolis carolinensis*)
- Brown Anole (*Anolis sagrei*)
- Gold Dust Day Gecko (*Phelsuma laticauda*)
- Hawaiian garden spider (*Argiope appensa*)
- Kamehameha Lady (*Vanessa tameamea*) - Endemic
- Hawaiian Blue (Blackburn's Blue) (*Udara blackburni*) - Endemic
- Gulf Fritillary (*Dione vanillae*)
- Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*)
- Cabbage White (*Pieris rapae*)
- Sulfur butterfly species (*Colias sp.*)