

Hawaii Trip Report (March 2024)

[Link: Hawaii Trip Report \(March 2024\)](#)

We visited three islands on the Eagle-Eye Hawaii March 9-20, 2024 tour: Oahu, Kauai, and Hawaii.

OAHU

We began on the island of Oahu with a morning hike in the high country above Honolulu where we encountered both of the island's remaining endemic passerines, the Oahu Amakihi and the endangered Oahu Elepaio. We saw several of the Amakihis, our first Hawaiian honeycreeper of the tour, which eventually gave all great views as we watched them use their gently curved bills to feed on the lovely red blossoms of the Ohia trees. While most of us were enjoying one particularly cooperative Amakihi, an Oahu Elepaio snuck briefly into view. We then headed to the coast to seek out waterbirds. After enjoying a delicious fish taco lunch from a food truck on the west shore of the island, we ventured to the edge of an oceanside golf course where we found the Bristle-thighed Curlew that had joined the dozen or so Pacific Golden Plovers spending the winter there. This curlew nests only in Alaska and makes a remarkable migration across the ocean to remote Pacific islands, with just a few wintering in Hawaii.



Bristle-thighed Curlew © Louie Dombroski

Continuing on our trip around the island, we stopped at the Lanai Lookout where we spotted humpback whales and a parade of Sooty Tern flocks winging by, as well as our first boobies, tropicbirds, and albatrosses of the tour! On our last morning on Oahu we familiarized ourselves with

some introduced species at the park across from our hotel, taking in eye candy such as Zebra Doves, Rose-ringed Parakeets, Yellow-fronted Canaries, Red-crested Cardinals and the ubiquitous Warbling White-eyes. In a rare case of a native Hawaiian bird adapting well to the changes brought about by the arrival of our species to the islands, White Terns have taken to nesting in trees that line the streets between the skyscrapers of Honolulu. The sight of these dainty birds flying over the beach and into the trees in the park was surreal and unforgettable. This iconic species lays a single egg on a horizontal tree branch; the hatchling then uses specially adapted claws to cling to its perch until fledging time.



White Tern nest tree © Louie Dombroski



KAUAI

On the island of Kauai, we ventured to the Ninini Lighthouse, stopping along the way to view several new species such as Scaly-breasted Munia, Hawaiian Coot, the Hawaiian subspecies of Common Gallinule, and our first "real" Hawaiian Ducks -- ones that appeared to be free of traits that would indicate hybridization with Mallards. Numerous Hawaiian Geese or Nenes, an endemic species brought back from the brink of extinction, looked very much at home on the neighboring golf course. During a picnic lunch at Poipu Beach Park we had a close visit from a Brown Booby and in a nearby pond saw our first (Hawaiian) Black-necked Stilt, but the Hawaiian Monk Seals and Hawaiian Green Sea Turtles on the beach stole the show! Other highlights along the coastal road included our first Java Sparrows and Chestnut Munias, and we took time to enjoy a Pueo (the native Hawaiian form of Short-eared Owl) perched on a wire along the road.



Kauai beach with Hawaiian Monk Seal © Louie Dombroski



Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle © Louie Dombroski

We spent the better part of one day in the forested high country of Kokee State Park. A thick fog had set in prior to our arrival, but upon reaching the Kalalau Lookout the fog magically cleared, revealing a breathtaking view of cliffs and waterfalls all the way down to the ocean some six thousand feet below. We were all able to get great scope looks at White-tailed Tropicbirds leisurely soaring back and forth along the cliffs. Here we saw our first Apapanes (the commonest of the red-plumaged Hawaiian honeycreepers).



Kalalau Lookout, Kokee State Park © Louie Dombroski

During a hike on a nearby trail we had great views of a number of endemic Kauai Elepaios, which lived up to their reputation for being curious and friendly. A pair of skulky Chinese Hwameis made a brief appearance, but we were treated to great views of a singing Japanese Bush Warbler, every feather quivering as it sang its distinctive explosive song; this common but secretive introduced species is heard far more often than it is seen. On our way back down the mountain we made a stop to soak in the expansive view at a lookout over the Waimea River Valley, a view punctuated by over a dozen soaring White-tailed Tropicbirds! A highlight of the tour was our visit to the Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge, where we had dreamy looks at both Red-tailed and White-tailed Tropicbirds flying by the lighthouse at close range. Laysan Albatrosses were viewed both in flight and at their nests on a nearby hill. We were treated to the sight of numerous Red-footed Boobies as they flew by, some with branches in their beaks, red feet splayed as they landed in trees where their nests were under construction. We were delighted to find that a few pairs of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters had returned to nest. 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. At a picnic lunch stop at Anini Park we enjoyed scope looks at a tame White-rumped Shama, a boldly-patterned passerine introduced from India.

HAWAII

We began our exploration of the big island of Hawaii with a tour of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park accompanied by a knowledgeable local guide who gave us a thorough introduction to the geological history of the park. We walked through the Thurston Lava Tube, lingering in the forest at either end in hopes of seeing an Omao, a somber-colored yet attractive endemic thrush. We would hear their distinctive calls in the park, but would have to wait a few days to lay eyes on one. While headed to our picnic lunch stop we spotted a pair of Hawaiian Hawks, and fortunately we were able to pull over safely so we could bail out of the van for a closer look. We watched in awe as the pair, one dark morph and one light morph, engaged in an acrobatic aerial courtship display. We hiked a trail through a kipuka (an isolated patch of forest spared by a lava flow, making it an island for native plants and animals), spotting the island's endemic species of Elepaio, and getting repeated looks at numerous Apapanes, experience that would prove useful as we searched for the two rarer reddish-plumaged honeycreepers that we would see in a few days.





Thurston Lava Tube © Louie Dombroski

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 Black Noddies, and we were able to locate a rare male Harlequin Duck that had been spending the winter there. From our base in Kona we ventured to Hakalau National Forest with an excellent local guide from Hawaii Forest and Trail, where we added four species of Hawaiian Honeycreepers to our trip list, including the Iiwi, a bright scarlet and black bird with a distinctive sickle-shaped bill it uses to feed on lobelia blossoms, and the orange-hued Hawaii Akepa and its yellow-plumaged relative the Hawaii Creeper. We also were lucky to see two individuals of one of the most sought after and enigmatic of the Hawaiian honeycreepers, the Akiapolaau. We were able to observe its unusual feeding behavior -- this species has a uniquely shaped bill with a straight chisel-like lower mandible and a long 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 to gather the beetle larva on which it feeds. We also saw Hawaii Amakihis and more Apapanes, and finally got good looks at two Omaos, the endemic thrush we had previously only heard. Our final full day of the tour started with a trip to the dry western side of Mauna Kea, where we saw lots of Hawaii Amakihis, but missed out on one of our target birds, the endangered Palila. We saw many singing Eurasian Skylarks and enjoyed seeing Short-eared Owls both in flight and perched. On our way back to Kona we birded a site on the outskirts of the town of Waikoloa and had great looks at Rosy-faced Lovebirds, Gray Francolins, Java Sparrows, Saffron Finches, African Silverbills, and a highlight for all, a cooperative flock of Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse!



Birding on Mauna Kea © Louie Dombroski

[Hawaii birding tour 2024 species list](#)