



Nu'upia Ponds Wildlife Management Area by Karen Bryan

About a thousand years ago, the Nu'upia Ponds were created by native Hawaiians as part of an advanced pond system to raise and harvest fish. Prior to western contact in 1778, at least 30 fishponds were scattered along Kāne'ohē Bay. Food items such as seaweed and fish harvested from the ponds supported the natives of the Ko'olaupoko district, one of the largest populations in the Hawaiian Islands. Today, the fishponds at MCBH are part of the Nu'upia Ponds Wildlife Management Area, a wetland refuge for native, endangered, and protected birds and Hawaiian green sea turtles.

The Nu'upia Ponds Wildlife Management Area is an ecosystem—a biological community of organisms interacting with their physical environment. The flora and fauna found at the ponds generally exist in harmony. The plants and animals depend on each other to survive. But, ecosystems have a delicate balance, and any disruption to the ecosystem by introduced species can be detrimental to the native organisms. Introduced species are plants and animals that were accidentally or deliberately transported to the area by humans. Of course, native species are the plants and animals that originated and live in an area naturally without the involvement of human activity. When a new plant or animal is introduced, it competes with the native organisms for resources such as space and food.

As you can imagine, a lot of changes occurred in Nu'upia Ponds over time as humans came and went. The MCBH Environmental team battled introduced species, especially those that became invasive—fast-growing, aggressive species that deplete resources and disrupt the balance of the natural ecosystem. Red mangrove trees and pickleweed are examples of invasive plants. Rats and mongoose are invasive animals that must be controlled to protect ground-nesting birds that call the Nu'upia Ponds home. MCBH Environmental Division staff, Marines, Civilians, and countless volunteers have worked diligently over the past 30-40 years to restore balance to the ecosystem by removing invasive plants. In addition, invasive animals are trapped and removed from the Nu'upia Ponds to ensure that native birds are safe from potential predators. Currently, efforts continue to maintain the delicate balance in the wetland ecosystem. Every other month, a group called the Weed Warriors meet to tackle various invasive plants at Nu'upia Ponds and other areas aboard MCBH. Be on the lookout for announcements on the notification board and social media outlets to get involved with the Weed Warriors, and be part of conservation and restoration at MCBH. Volunteers must be at least 13 years old, and parental supervision is required for those under 18 years old. Next event: June 13, 2020. Call 257-7000 to sign up. For more info about Nu'upia ponds, check out: <https://www.mcbhawaii.marines.mil/Offices-Staff/S-4-Installations-Environment-Logistics/Environmental/Natural-Resources/Volunteer-Outreach-Recreation/Nuupia-Ponds-Running-Trail/>

Mālama i ka 'āina—care for and live in harmony with the land. Earth Day every day. **Activity:** While following social distancing guidelines, take a walk around the Nu'upia Ponds. Post a photo of your scavenger hunt page (above) OR post a photo of something you saw. Post in the comments below. Random drawings for participant prizes will be held after COVID-19 social distancing is lifted.