

Spreading Our Wings and Broadening Our Minds by Karen Bryan

Waterbird surveys have been conducted in Hawaii since the 1940s to evaluate the distribution of waterfowl populations. When four endemic species of waterbirds—the Hawaiian stilt, gallinule, coot, and duck—were declared federally endangered in the late 1960s, Bird Nerds recognized the need to conduct surveys more often. In the mid-1980s, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) scientists decided to conduct synchronized state-wide waterbird surveys during summer and winter with the goal to track minimum population estimates not only for endemic but migratory waterbirds as well. MCBH Environmental Division Natural Resource Managers collaborate with the Division of Forestry and Wildlife to complete waterbird surveys aboard the Base on the 3rd Wednesday of January and August each year.

Biannual Waterbird Surveys cover most aquatic habitats such as lowland wetlands and reservoirs. If an area is inaccessible or hazardous, it is excluded from the counts. Incredibly, there are 19 different survey sites on MCBH such as each of the individual ponds in the Nu‘upia Ponds Wildlife Management Area and the ponds at the golf course. The team divides and conquers to complete the surveys in the allotted time of five hours.

So, which birds are counted? The endemic (found only in Hawaii) and endangered birds such as the Hawaiian stilt, gallinule, coot, and duck are on the list. Photos and facts about each of these birds can be found on the Base’s Environmental Division Natural Resources website at: <https://www.mcbhawaii.marines.mil/Offices-Staff/S-4-Installations-Environment-Logistics/Environmental/Natural-Resources/Wildlife/> . Other birds counted include the black-crowned night heron, ruddy turnstone, wandering tattler, and the bristle-thighed curlew. The results of the survey showed that MCBH is home to numerous species of federally protected birds that live in suitable habitat within undeveloped wildlife management areas where they can forage, nest, and thrive naturally.

Activity: While practicing social distancing, try to identify waterbirds in the area with the guide found at: https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/dofaw/files/2014/02/WaterbirdCount_photoguide.pdf . Hawaiian stilts, ruddy turnstones, and Pacific golden plovers can commonly be seen in your own yard. Birds are difficult to photograph, so please share if you get a picture! Or, draw a picture of your favorite waterbird at MCBH and email it to susan.bryan.ctr@usmc.mil .

Mālama i ka ‘āina—care for and live in harmony with the land. Earth Day every day at MCBH!