

Do you know the Pueo? by Karen Bryan

The pueo is a subspecies of the short-eared owl in Hawai‘i, and it is endemic—found nowhere else in the world. Pueo are mottled brown with lighter bellies and round faces as in the photo above. Pueo prefer open landscapes including wetland areas such as the Nu‘upia Ponds at MCBH and may be seen at higher elevations in wooded areas. Pueo nest on the ground and often perch on wooden fence posts to rest or seek prey items such as rodents, insects, and small birds. The pueo is often mentioned in Hawaiian culture as an ‘aumākuā or ancestral spirit. At MCBH, there are 8 – 10 pueos that may be seen in the early morning or at dusk near the Nu‘upia Ponds or the airfield. If you see an owl during the day, it’s probably a barn owl, but it is not completely unlikely to see pueo during the day. Don’t confuse the Pueo with the non-native barn owl. The barn owl is much lighter overall with a heart-shaped face. See a barn owl here: <https://www.mcbhawaii.marines.mil/Portals/114/WebImages/Departments/IEL/Environmental/NaturalResources/BarnOwlLg.jpg> .

Pueo were once abundant on O‘ahu, but have become endangered as a result of mongoose and rodents that prey on their eggs and nestlings. When pueo evolved in the Hawaiian Islands, there were no mammalian predators such as the mongoose, so nesting on the ground was suitable. Other threats to pueo include “cats at large,” disease, vehicle strikes, and light pollution. MCBH contracted the University of Hawaii to conduct a two-year study on the biology of the pueo and to identify management recommendations that will enhance pueo survival.

To learn more about the pueo and what MCBH is doing to protect them go to: <https://www.mcbhawaii.marines.mil/Portals/114/WebDocuments/IEL/Environmental/NaturalResources/PueoConservationManagement.pdf> . If you see a pueo, snap a photo and please report it to the Environmental Division at 257-7000.

Activity: Make a pueo finger puppet or mask with materials you have at home. A family of pueo puppets is even better! Email photos to susan.bryan.ctr@usmc.mil . Random drawings for prizes will be held when social distancing has been lifted.

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