

Mud Ops 2020: This training op is for the birds, literally.

Every year, Natural Resource managers from the Environmental Compliance & Protection Division join forces with the 3rd Marines' Combat Assault Company (CAC) to help control a persistent invasive plant in the Nu'upia Ponds Wildlife Management Area. The three-day operation called "Mud Ops" has been a consistent training opportunity for the CAC since 1970. Endangered native Hawaiian stilts use the Nu'upia ponds and other wetland areas on MCBH to breed and nest from about March until September, so the operations are conducted in February each year. Amphibious Assault Vehicles (AAVs) are used to break-up the non-native invasive plant called pickleweed or 'ākulikuli kai (*Batis maritima*). The ground cover can grow to a height of 2 feet and spreads quickly. If left uncontrolled, pickleweed would take over the habitat for ground-nesting Hawaiian stilts that prefer an open sandy area or mudflat habitat. Natural Resource Managers, Lance Bookless and Keith Roberts, coordinate routes through the ponds and help to guide the AAVs through the thick mud. This operation is a win-win situation. It presents an exclusive and valuable training opportunity for the CAC, and it has helped to ensure that endangered native bird populations like the stilt can thrive at MCBH. It is clear that waterbirds benefit from the open wetland areas for nesting, breeding, and feeding.

Activity: Draw it! Use your imagination, and draw Nu'upia Ponds and the happy waterbirds. Or, use things found around the house to make a waterbird habitat model. Post photos in the comments below. Random drawings for participant prizes will be held after COVID-19 social distancing is lifted.

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