

Hawaiian Stilt

COMMON NAME: Hawaiian stilt

HAWAIIAN NAME: *Ae'o*

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Himantopus mexicanus knudseni*

LEGAL STATUS: Endangered (Federal and State). Vulnerable (IUCN Red List). MBTA protected.

APPEARANCE: The Hawaiian stilt is a slender, pink-legged, wading shorebird with black upper-parts, white under-parts, and a long black bill. It grows up to 15 inches in length. The Hawaiian subspecies differs from the North American stilt by having more black on its face and neck, a longer bill, tarsus, and tail.

NATIVE RANGE: Hawaiian stilts are non-migratory birds, endemic to Hawai'i. They still occur on all major islands, except Kaho'olawe, with the majority of the population occurring on Maui and O'ahu.

HABITAT: Hawaiian stilts utilize fresh, brackish and saline coastal waters. They use little vegetation for nesting or feeding and breed in marshland, mudflats, and shallow open water. They require specific water depths of around five inches for optimal foraging. Hawaiian stilts feed in shallow water primarily on invertebrates, crustaceans, aquatic and terrestrial insects, and small fish.

REPRODUCTION: Hawaiian stilts nest on low relief shorelines, mudflats in wetlands, and small islands within bodies of water. Nesting occurs from March to August with a peak in May-June. At MCBH Kaneohe Bay stilt nesting season peaks in June-July, which is later than on the south side of O'ahu. During nesting, stilts move between a nesting area and a feeding area. Although chicks leave the nest immediately, immature birds stay in family groups through the winter until the next breeding season begins.

ECOLOGICAL THREATS: The primary cause of species decline is the loss and degradation of wetland habitat and predation by introduced species, especially the small Asian mongoose. Mongooses are voracious predators that are especially harmful to ground nesting birds such as the endangered Hawaiian stilt. Other factors include free roaming cats, alien plants, disease and some environmental contaminants.

MCBH CONSERVATION MEASURES: Hawaiian stilts have been recorded at coastal wetlands on MCBH Kaneohe Bay including Nu'upia Ponds Wildlife Management Area, on MCTAB, and at Pearl City Annex. The 'aeo is the mascot of Mokapu Elementary School on MCBH Kaneohe Bay.



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Conservation measures to benefit the stilt population include:

- **Habitat protection and enhancement.** Stilt habitat enhancement consists primarily of invasive weed removal. For example, invasive pickleweed (*Batis maritima*) is ground-up during the annual Mud Ops event. Other invasive weeds such as mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*) are controlled through Weed Warrior service projects. Established BMPs and conservation measures are employed when a project may have an effect on bird behavior.
- **Limiting disturbance.** BMPs to benefit Hawaiian stilts include restrictions on construction and human activity at Nu'upia Ponds Wildlife Management Area and other wetlands. Hawaiian stilts appear unfazed by human activity, including normal light and noise pollution associated with the Base, and it does not appear to affect their breeding success.
- **Wildlife Friendly Lighting.** Although lighting on Base does not appear to be an issue, Natural Resources staff diligently work with Base and contract planners to incorporate International Dark-Sky lighting recommendations into all projects.
- **Predator control.** Hawaiian stilts benefit from the on-going trapping of cats, mongoose, and rats within Nu'upia Ponds Wildlife Management Area and other wetlands.
- **Monitoring to help direct management activities.** Natural Resources staff record occurrences and consult with USFWS as needed. Regularly conducted surveys for waterbirds indicate that the number of Hawaiian stilts at MCBH has remained steady since 1991.
- **Education and outreach.** Development and distribution of informational material regarding the Nu'upia Ponds habitat and stilts includes videos, fact sheets, and briefings for military personnel and civilians on Base including new arrivals, and outreach with volunteers.

For more information: MCBH Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan. 2016. Section 7.1, 7.5, 9, Appendix C & D.

PHOTOS

1. Hawaiian stilt. MCBH.
2. Hawaiian stilt mother and chicks. MCBH.