

Birding Ecotours



BIRDING TOUR USA: HAWAII – ABA & ENDEMIC BIRDING IN THE PACIFIC

31 JANUARY - 09 FEBRUARY 2023



Hawaii Akepa is one of the many Hawaiian endemics, and a highly sought-after species.

Hawaii - commonly referred to as the ‘Aloha State’ with its welcoming atmosphere, is a tropical paradise that is about as unique as they come. Once an independent nation, years ago, Hawaii is now an officially recognized US state, making up one of the 50 US states. Hawaii is comprised of a string of islands known as the Hawaiian Archipelago, located far out in the Pacific Ocean, isolated from the rest of the world. There are eight primary islands that feature in the archipelago, namely - Ni‘ihau, Kaua‘i, O‘ahu, Moloka‘i, Lāna‘i, Kaho‘olawe, Maui, and Hawai‘i (Big Island).

Hawaii is well known as a prime vacation and wedding destination, and has a great many highlights featuring some of the best surfing in the world and the largest naval command in the world. Hawaii’s biodiversity and in particular its avifauna is somewhat less well-known, and historically hasn’t accounted for much of the tourism boon to the region – but this is steadily changing.

Due to its isolation from the rest of the world, Hawaii has a very high rate of endemism and features a number of strange and peculiar-looking birds, found nowhere else. It is extremely unfortunate that indeed a great number of various Asian and European species were introduced to these islands, as these, together with other introduced taxa, and the spread of mosquitos and malaria, have all had a devastating impact on the local biodiversity, and especially its birdlife. A large number of species have become extinct, with many more species now rare and thinly distributed, and on the precipice of extinction.



*This tour targets all three endemic elepaio species including this **Kauai Elepaio**.*

The official recognition of Hawaii and its birds, as countable for the official ABA checklist, has encouraged a great deal of American based birders to venture to these islands, in search of the many unique species found here. Although the region has drawn in ‘world-birders’ seeking to add these endemic species to their world lists, this inclusion has had a widespread positive impact on raising awareness to the plight of Hawaii’s threatened birds. It is thus with a great deal of pride

that we have added a birding tour to Hawaii, as we strive to continue help raising awareness of the plight of Hawaii's endemic birds, and indeed help various conservation bodies throughout the state of Hawaii.

Our birding tour takes in the three main and easily accessible islands, O'ahu, Kaua'i and Hawai'i (the latter more commonly known as Big Island). Here we focus our efforts on getting to the different sections of higher-altitudinal montane forest, in search of the various endemics and specials that still persist, while also ensuring we try and find as many of the various introduced species as possible. Some of the island's most sought-after endemics include such species as Iiwi, Akiapolaau, Palila, Apapane, Akekee and Anianiau, through to more widely known species such as **Nene** (Hawaiian Goose) – which is also the official state bird of Hawaii. Other desirable species such as **Bristle-thighed Curlew**, **Hawaiian Petrel**, **White Tern**, and **Laysan Albatross** also form core targets on our tour.

Hawaii's blend of highly localized birds, jaw-dropping coastal vistas and the feeling of being in a tropical island paradise – all the while adding species to both your world and ABA lists, make Hawaii a destination not to be missed!

Itinerary (10 days/9 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Honolulu, O'ahu

Today is your arrival day, and you can arrive at your leisure. Upon arrival in Honolulu (HNL) you will be transferred to our comfortable lodge, where we will spend the next three nights. Should there be time available in the afternoon, we may do some local birding nearby, getting familiar with some of the more regularly occurring species (see under Day 2 below for more details). We will gather in the lobby at 6pm for our welcome dinner.

Overnight: Queen Kapi'olani Hotel, Waikiki

Day 2. Birding O'ahu – Waikiki to the Ko'olau Range

Our first morning will be spent birding around the Kapi'olani Regional Park. One of the star species here is **White Tern**, while **Pacific Golden Plover** is another sought-after species at this site. A wide array of introduced species can also be sought and include the likes of **Rose-ringed Parakeet**, **Zebra** and **Spotted Doves**, **Java Sparrow**, **Common Waxbill**, **Red-crested Cardinal** and **Yellow-fronted Canary**. The rest of the day is spent outside of Waikiki in the forests of the Ko'olau Range where we will be primarily searching for the endemic Oahu Amakihi and the Oahu Elepaio. Both of these species are red-listed as per the IUCN Red List (being Vulnerable and Endangered, respectively). Indeed, rather tragically, many of the other endemic species occurring throughout the Hawaiian Islands are also red-listed and many of them Critically Endangered. Further introduced species, such as **White-rumped Shama**, **Warbling White-eye** and **Red-billed Leiothrix** can be seen in this area as well.

Overnight: Queen Kapi'olani Hotel, Waikiki

Day 3. Birding O'ahu – The north shore

Our day will be spent birding and exploring the coastal region along the north shore of the island. Although perhaps more well-known for its picturesque beaches with world-class surfing, the secluded coves and tracts of shoreline, along with the vast family farms (with crops of coffee, coao and many others) are home to the highly sought-after **Bristle-thighed Curlew**, along with a wide range of other targets such as **Wandering Tattler**, an endemic subspecies of **Black-necked Stilt** and the endemic **Hawaiian Coot**. Further introduced species such as **Saffron Finch** and **Chestnut Munia** can also be found in the area.

Overnight: Queen Kapi'olani Hotel, Waikiki



Bristle-thighed Curlew can be seen on O'ahu.

Day 4. Flight to Kaua'i and birding Kaua'i

We have the morning at our leisure as we have a mid-morning flight to Lihue on Kaua'i. Following our arrival, we will begin exploring Kaua'i's beautiful north shore. We will focus our efforts around the rugged cliffs of the coastal Kīlauea Point National Wildlife Refuge and the freshwater-dominated Hanalei National Wildlife Refuge. One of our main targets at Kīlauea Point is the stunning **Laysan Albatross** – small numbers of which breed here. Other species we'll be searching for are **Red-footed** and **Brown Boobies**, stunning **Red-tailed** and **White-tailed Tropicbirds** and **Great Frigatebird** (a similar, yet different species to the Magnificent Frigatebird occurring on mainland USA). **Nene** (also known as Hawaiian Goose), which is the state bird of Hawaii, usually provide us with great views throughout the day as well. **Hawaiian Duck** will be one of our main targets at the Hanalei National Wildlife Refuge.

Overnight: Sheraton Kauai Coconut Beach Resort, Kapaa



Nene (also known as Hawaiian Goose) is the state bird of Hawaii.

Day 5. Birding Kaua'i – Kōke'e State Park

We will dedicate the day to birding and exploring the glorious Kōke'e State Park. This lush mountainous park offers the best endemic birding on the island, and we will spend our time birding the rainforests for a wide assortment of difficult-to-pronounce specials such as **Kauai Amakihi**, **Apapane**, **Anianiau**, **Kauai Elepaio** and even the rare and IUCN Critically Endangered **Akekee**. This area also plays host to further introduced (yet countable) species such as **Red Junglefowl**, the difficult-to-see **Japanese Bush Warbler**, and **Chinese Hwamei**. Aside from this exciting endemic birding, we are also assured to enjoy incredible vistas of the Waimea Canyon, known as the 'Grand Canyon of the Pacific'.

Overnight: Sheraton Kauai Coconut Beach Resort, Kapaa

Day 6. Birding Kaua'i and flight to Kona, Big Island

We have a full morning available to us to continue birding and exploring Kaua'i. We will search for **Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush** today in particular, although we will need some luck to see this species, along with any of the island's specials we may have missed, listed under Days 4 and 5 above. We will undertake an afternoon flight to Kona, on Big Island (also known as Hawai'i) from where we will settle in for the afternoon, and spend the next four nights.

Overnight: Royal Kona Resort, Kona

Day 7. Birding Big Island - Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge

One of the most important birding sites for endemic Hawaiian species, throughout all of the Hawaiian Islands, is the Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge. Dominated by montane cloud forest, with a strong suite of native plants and general wildlife still largely persisting, we will spend the entire day birding this wonderful protected and highly restricted area. Some of our target species here include the likes of **Hawaiian Hawk**, **Omao**, **Hawaii Creeper**, **Hawaii Akepa**, **Akiapolaau**, **Iiwi**, **Hawaii Amakihi** and **Apapane**. Whilst exploring the area for these species, and others, the ancient ohia trees that dominate the area will take you to a time period long past, allowing us to better understand the plight of Hawaii's endemic species.

Overnight: Royal Kona Resort, Kona



Akiapolaau is another highly sought-after Hawaiian endemic – just look at that beak!

Day 8. Birding Big Island - Pu'u La'au, Mauna Kea and surrounds

We have a full day set aside to explore other important birding areas on the island – ranging from the high elevations of Pu'u La'au on the slopes of the dormant volcano, Mauna Kea, along the Saddle Road, to the more coastal Waikōloa area. Two important endemic species that we will focus our efforts on today are the **Hawaii Elepaio** and the Critically Endangered (IUCN) **Palila**. Various other new species we are unlikely to have seen yet might include **Short-eared Owl**, **Wild Turkey**, **California Quail**, **Erckel's Spurfowl**, **Black and Grey Francolins**, **Chukar Partridge**, **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse**, **Eurasian Skylark** and **African Silverbill**.

Overnight: Royal Kona Resort, Kona

Day 9. Pelagic Birding off Big Island

Today we will undertake a pelagic trip out of Honokohau Harbor. Together with our trusty captain and boat, we will spend most of the day out in the deep. In between the more regularly occurring species, we'll keep a keen eye open for the likes of a wide range of exciting and fast-flying gadfly *Pterodroma* petrels, namely **Hawaiian, Juan Fernandez, Mottled, White-necked** and **Black-winged Petrels**, **Christmas** and the Critically Endangered (IUCN) **Newell's Shearwaters**, **Leach's** and **Band-rumped Storm Petrels**, **Masked Booby**, **South Polar Skua** and more. Indeed, the truly exciting aspect about pelagic birding is that you can never truly predict what you'll see out there! More regularly occurring species typically seen include **Wedge-tailed** and **Sooty Shearwaters**, **Bulwer's Petrel**, **Great Frigatebird**, the stunning **White-tailed Tropicbird**, **Brown Booby**, **Sooty Tern** and both **Black** and **Brown Noddies**. Occasional cetacean sightings also feature on these trips.

Following an excellent day out on the water, we will enjoy our final dinner together, and reminisce about the many exciting birds we would have seen.

Overnight: Royal Kona Resort, Kona



*We'll be on the lookout for **White-tailed Tropicbird** and more on our pelagic day trip.*

Day 10. Departure from Kona, Hawaii

The tour comes to an end today, and you can depart home from Kona Airport.

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration:	10 days
Group Size:	6 - 8
Dates:	31 January – 09 February 2023
Start:	Honolulu, Hawaii, USA
End:	Kona, Hawaii, USA
Prices:	US\$7,900 per person sharing – based on 6 - 8 participants
Single Supplements:	US\$1,700

Price includes:

All accommodation
Meals (from dinner on Day 1 until breakfast on Day 10)
Unlimited bottled water
Expert tour leader
Local bird guide fees
All entrance fees
All ground transport, including airport pick-up and drop-off
In-tour flights (from O’ahu/Honolulu – Kauai/Lihue; from Kauai/Lihue to Big Island/Kona)

Price excludes:

Pre/post-tour flights (to Honolulu, Hawaii /from Kona, Hawaii)
Visas (if needed)
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.
Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding excursions
Soft/alcoholic drinks
Personal travel insurance
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))