



## MFBRP NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2008

### **SAYING GOOD-BYE TO KIRSTY AND HELLO TO A NEW FIELD CREW**



The Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project is moving forward this year minus one very influential staff member. Kirsty Swinnerton, who has been the Project Coordinator for MFBRP since 2003, left Hawaii in September to become a Project Manager for Island Conservation in British Columbia, Canada. Kirsty led the MFBRP teams through the final Po'ouli capture as well as multiple seasons of Maui Parrotbill research and management. She will be missed in Maui but we wish her the best of luck with all of the new projects that she is taking on.



The MFBRP continues this year with some new and old faces. Our current team consists of Julie Garvin, Senior Avian Conservation Research Specialist and Hanna Mounce, Interim Project Coordinator, who will both continue their work with parrotbill this season. We also welcomed back Ruby Hammond, now an Ornithological Research Associate, who was a field technician for us last season. New faces include Tonya Rasmussen and Anna Rauch-Sasseen through the Hawaii Youth Conservation Corp and John Diener, Tricia Rodriguez, Brad Ogle and Richard Aracil who will all be working on parrotbill research. We are looking forward to a great year!

**A special thanks to DOFAW and PCSU for all of their additional help and support during our staff changes!!**

### **A MAUI CREEPER FROM THE EARLY 1990s STILL FIRED UP**

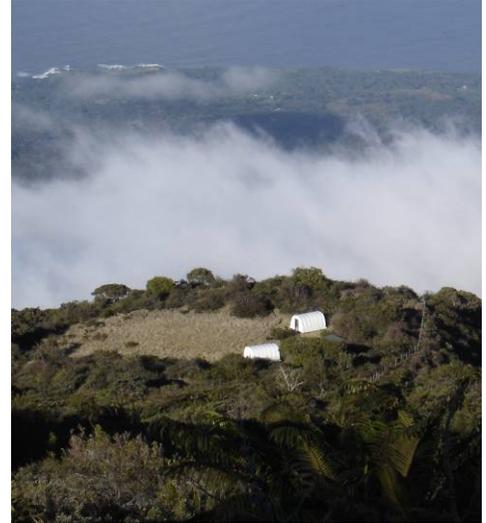


The MFBRP uses mark and re-sight techniques to monitor all of the birds that we work with. This “capture-mark-release” methodology is an invaluable tool for wildlife biologists, allowing us to identify individuals and record an astounding amount of information. We are particularly interested in using this tool for survival analyses and home range delineation. We regularly target Maui Creepers while mist-netting to expand our color-banded population, and to collect fecal samples and morphological measurements. While Maui creepers are very inquisitive, which draws them to our banding operations, they are also very intelligent and tentative to fly across open areas like the space where a mist-net would be strung. Due to these behaviors we rarely recapture individuals after we initially band them. This past December we had a brilliantly bright yellow male who was already banded fly into our nets while chasing two other males. We assumed that these three birds were in a pre-breeding territorial dispute. The very faded color bands indicated the he was not a recently banded bird. Once we looked up his unique band number and color combination in our database, it was discovered that this male was banded on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, 1996! This small bird, weighing 15.5g is out there still defending his territory at the age of 12!!

## A DAY IN FRISBEE MEADOWS

By Tricia Rodriguez

I awoke in my sleeping bag, slightly damp but warm. It was beginning to get light outside, so I left the cozy warmth behind and hurriedly dressed in my quick-dry underlayers, rain gear, and rubber boots. As I unzipped the door on our weatherport tent, the smell of coffee brewing in the kitchen hut perked me up. After eating breakfast and putting together snacks and lunch for the field, the crew discussed where we would each be starting our day. Our goal was to spread out and cover as much ground on the site as possible - of course, we were all hoping to get a good look at the endangered Maui Parrotbill, but to even hear one sing would provide important clues about its territory. I headed down from 7000 feet along the eastern boundary of our study site, which follows the fenceline. This fence is essential in the protection of the native forest of Hanawi Natural Area Reserve because it prevents non-native pigs from entering this pristine area. I followed the narrow, muddy trail down the slope, stopping frequently to look and listen for the parrotbill. There was quite a bit of bird activity - Maui Creepers ('Alauahio) were moving around in small groups, Amakihi were foraging beneath some nearby ferns, I'iwi were flying through the canopy overhead, and Akohekohe were making quite a ruckus in the Ohia trees. Despite such incredible and colorful company, I decided to move a bit further downhill where a parrotbill was heard singing the previous day. Once I reached this area, I pulled out a dry bandana and wiped the rain and fog from my binoculars. If there was a Maui Parrotbill nearby, I wanted a clear view! I wandered slowly along the trails, my senses heightened to the smallest movements and the faintest sounds. It began to rain, but since this is the usual weather in Hanawi, I continued to look and listen. By afternoon, I was completely soaked and still in the same area. However, my efforts paid off as the sun broke through the clouds and I felt its warmth on my face. As I admired a rainbow in the distance, a loud clear song rang out directly overhead - *chewy chewy chewy chewy!* There was a Maui Parrotbill in the Ohia tree just above me! I wiped my binoculars clean without ever looking away from the clump of leaves that the song came from.



Finally, I saw a bit of movement, then the bird flew from the tree onto an ohelo branch, where he began to look for insect larvae by prying off bark with his large hooked bill. My heart was racing as I watched this rare, beautiful bird in his natural habitat! As he turned, I got a quick look at his legs - he was not banded. This is very exciting because it means we will get the chance to catch him and apply a unique combination of lightweight color bands which allow us to identify this individual bird from afar throughout the season, as well as in the future. Just as quickly as he appeared, he was gone. I tried to follow him, but the

terrain and thick forest made it difficult to keep up. After a few more minutes of trying to locate the bird, I pulled out my field notebook and began writing a detailed description of everything I just saw. So little is known about this bird that every observation is important to record. I marked my precise location in the notebook and continued to move around the site. Around 4 PM, I decided to call it a day and head back to camp. By this time, it was raining again and the trails were slick, so I slowly

and carefully trudged back up the slope. Back at camp, the kitchen was stirring with activity. One crew member was preparing dinner, while others were logging their activities in the cabin journal and transferring information from their field notebooks onto site maps. Everybody was excitedly sharing their experiences of the day. After dinner, I headed back to the tent and crawled into my sleeping bag, tired but satisfied. Hopefully tomorrow will bring more parrotbill sightings, and each day will bring us closer to finding their nests and learning more about this rare and elusive bird.



## **STORM TOOK A TOLL ON HANAWI**

When the MFBRP team went back in the field after Christmas, we were welcomed with some severe storm damage at two of our three field camps. The heavy winds and rains that came through near the end of December did quite a bit of damage on the mountain. In addition to a number of downed

trees in the forest which could be expected after big winds in Hanawi, our cabins and weatherports were hit hard. Grassland Cabin (formerly Baker Camp) had three roof panels ripped off and flooded with rain. Our camp at Frisbee Meadows suffered even further. Our tarped kitchen-hut structure that we have been using for more than two years had the roof completely torn off. Our weatherports, which sit on permanent wooden platforms, were picked up off of their piers and moved three feet sideways, collapsing the supports. The force of this storm was amazing! Unfortunately, we now need to do a lot of construction repairs and have decided to build a more secure kitchen hut. To take this on, and improve field life for our team, we are asking for donations of a variety of building supplies. If anyone has any surplus building materials or anything that they feel they could donate (including expertise) we would greatly appreciate any help! Thank you to all of the community members who have aided us with donations thus far!!

***Some of the supplies that we are looking for (among others):***

***2x4s of any length***

***4x4s of any length***

***Corrugated metal roofing***

***Plastic guttering as well as connection pieces***

***Bolts more than 4" in length***

***Large flats of siding***

## **THANKS TO THE BISHOP FOR AN INSPIRING TOUR**

The 2008 MFBRP crew went to Oahu in January to get a tour of the extinct and extant Hawaiian forest bird collections from museum curator, Carla Kishinami. Getting a better perspective on the value of museum collections, and what may be useful from the field, inspired our new team and reinvigorated our commitment to forest bird recovery. **We want to extend a big thank you to the Bishop Museum and Carla for this opportunity.**

