



NEWS RELEASE

Contacts: Charlene Ka'uhane
President
Ka'uhane Communications, Inc.
Phone: (808) 243-2290; Fax: (808) 243-2211
E-mail: charlene@kauhanecommunications.com

Keli'i Brown
Director of Public Relations & Promotions
Maui Visitors Bureau
Phone: (808) 244-3530; Fax: (808) 244-1337
E-mail: kelii@mauivb.com

INSIDE THE ECOLOGY OF MAUI Caring for an environment unique in the world

MAUI, Hawai'i – The Hawaiian Islands form the most remote archipelago on earth, the result of volcanoes formed by the slow movement of the Pacific Plate across a molten-magma hot spot. Maui Nui, which includes Maui, Moloka'i, Lāna'i, and Kaho'olawe, once formed a single emergent island of volcanic eruptions, with Maui Island first being formed about 2 million years ago. Surrounded by a vast expanse of ocean, 2,500 miles from any other landmass, the islands eroded in utter isolation until the first Polynesian voyagers arrived maybe around 300 A.D. On wind, waves and wings a few species accidentally arrived.

While they rarely survived, once in a while, a spore, seed, insect, bird, or even a snail would manage to persevere. The few pioneer species that took hold embarked on a strange course of evolution and diversified into numerous new species uniquely adapted to their immediate surroundings – micro-ecosystems at times not larger than a single bog.

Today, rushing streams shaded by native sedges, plunging waterfalls flanked by tree ferns, jungles flitting with honeycreepers, eery dryland forests and a volcanic crater are all part of the rich ecological wilderness that thus evolved in Maui Nui, giving us a biodiversity of flora and fauna not found anywhere else in the world.

Embracing 30,000-plus acres, Haleakalā National Park has designated 80 percent of its lands as wilderness, but the biodiversity it shelters cannot be taken for granted: After 1778, the year that Captain Cook opened Hawai'i to the West, alien species brought in intentionally or as stowaways invaded the pristine environment of the islands. Species



native to the islands proved defenseless, the ecosystems fragile. Over the decades, original forests shrunk to small, remote pockets of life. Native species once arrived every 30,000 years, today a new species hitchhikes to Hawai'i about once every 20 days.

Haleakalā National Park harbors more endangered species than any other national park. In 1980, it was named an International Biosphere Reserve for the exemplary efforts to stop the extinction of Maui's extraordinary native plants and animals. A prime example is the Haleakalā silversword, a plant with long, arching sword-like leaves that form a silver waist-high sphere. The silversword flowers only once in its life, sending up a tall spike loaded with purple daisy-like flowers, and, after seeding, dies. All but extinct, it was saved by controlling wild goats that once roamed the crater, and by regulating the behavior of humans, who used to uproot the plants.

The park's conservation efforts are as tangible with the nēnē goose, the beloved State bird of Hawai'i, which is beginning to thrive again after having been reduced by predators and hunters from a natural population of about 25,000 to as few as 30 individual birds in the 1950s.

Haleakalā National Park wraps around the summit crater of East Maui's dormant volcano: At the park's summit headquarters visitors can join rangers to learn the stories behind the volcano's wilderness. Since the park is also imbued with cultural significance, you are bound to learn about Hawaiian culture as well. Drivers can reach the 10,023-foot summit by scaling Highway 378, said to be the steepest 45 minute road trip anywhere on earth.

Many other initiatives in Maui Nui are dedicated to conservation. Grassroots companies, large organizations, and community volunteers are working together to restore, protect, and preserve the environment. In 1952, David Thomas Fleming, a retired Maui ranch manager and Territory senator, started an arboretum in at Pu'u Māhoe at Ulupalakua to preserve species from the vanishing native dryland forest of Auwahi. Today, the D. T. Fleming Arboretum includes 110 species of native Hawaiian plants, 33 of which are endangered including the last seed-producing alani (*Melicope knudsenii*). Volunteers and Friends of the arboretum support its efforts to preserve Hawaiian native plants through protection, propagation and distribution. Tours are available on the last weekend of each month.

The Nature Conservancy Hawai'i also labors to restore the forests of Maui Nui, and is part of several Maui Nui public/private partnerships, including the East Maui Watershed Partnership. The East Maui partnership is concerned with an area that is home to 63 rare plant species and a greater concentration of rare and endangered birds than any other place in the United States. The watershed also serves as the largest source of harvested surface water in Hawai'i, critical to agriculture, residential living,



and commerce. So far, seemingly small tasks – fencing out animals such as feral pigs, goats, deer, and cattle; controlling invasive weeds such as miconia – have yielded huge results.

Waikamoi Preserve is a 5,230-acre cloud forest within the East Maui Watershed Partnership that teems with rare endemic plants and endangered forest birds. Especially when the native raspberry and other understory plants in bloom, resplendent honeycreepers can be seen at close proximity, You can reserve a spot for a guided Waikamoi Cloud Forest Hike through Haleakalā National Park or The Nature Conservancy. Volunteer work parties at Waikamoi may also be available.

The Nature Conservancy also leads hikes on Molokaʻi, at Kamakou Preserve. The rain forest of Kamakou Preserve lies near the summit of Molokaʻi's highest mountain and shelters more than 250 species of Hawaiian plants – at least 219 of which are endemic. The last known sightings of the Molokaʻi thrush (olomaʻo) and Molokaʻi creeper (kakawahie) were in this forest region, but you might yet glimpse the shy and vivid green ʻamakihi today.

You can take a short, self-guided tour through the 590-acre Kānepuʻu Preserve on Lānaʻi. This rare forest contains the largest remnants of olopua and lama dryland forest in Hawaiʻi and represents a type of forest that once covered much of the dry lowlands of the Hawaiian Islands. Among the trees are ʻaiea, once used for canoe building.

As Maui Nui deepens its knowledge about its unique ecology and integrates environmental initiatives further into visitor activities, conservation efforts such as the ones mentioned above are bound to multiply. These are fascinating times for those eager to explore the world's wild places as expressed in unique environments. In all its beauty and biodiversity, Maui speaks of evolutionary wonders as well as losses that bear significance on the entire earth.

pau/end