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Birds of Kauai, Vol. 1

I know very little about birds, so I can't tell you the name of the bird that I hear every morning saying what sounds to me like "sticky worms, sticky worms, sticky worms." But my lack of knowledge won't stop me from telling you about some of the birds on Kauai.

Nene

The Hawaiian state bird is the nene (or **nēnē**), the Hawaiian goose. It is the world's rarest goose, and it is only found here in the Hawaiian islands. Nene are herbivores, eating grasses, shrubs, leaves, seeds, flowers and fruit.

In my April newsletter, you learned that the Hawaiian islands used to be called the Sandwich Islands. The nene's specific name, *sandvicensis*, refers to this.



Bird Sanctuaries

There are two bird sanctuaries within 15 minutes of my condo. Here are the descriptions from the National Fish and Wildlife website.

*Kīlauea Point is a beacon of hope for threatened Hawaiian wildlife and their habitats as well as the home of a historic lighthouse. **Kīlauea Point National Wildlife Refuge's** dramatic backdrop of steep cliffs plunging to the ocean is one of the best places on the main Hawaiian Islands to view wildlife, and is also home to some of the largest populations of nesting seabirds found in Hawai'i. Visitors also have a chance to view spinner dolphins, Hawaiian monk seals, native Hawaiian coastal plants and Hawai'i's state bird - the nēnē or endangered Hawaiian goose.*





*Established in 1972, **Hanalei National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)** is the oldest of Kaua'i's three national wildlife refuges. The 917-acre Refuge is located in the beautiful Hanalei River Valley on Kaua'i's north shore. Encircled by waterfall-draped mountains, the picturesque Hanalei Valley on the north shore of Kaua'i harbors the Hanalei NWR. The Refuge was established under the Endangered Species Act to conserve five endangered water birds that rely on the Hanalei Valley for nesting and feeding habitat: the koloa maoli (Hawaiian duck), the 'alae ke'oke'o (Hawaiian coot), the 'alae'ula (Hawaiian moorhen), the ae'o (Hawaiian stilt), and the nēnē (Hawaiian goose). Forty-five other species of birds (18 of which are introduced species) also utilize refuge habitat at some point throughout the year.*

The Refuge is a relatively flat river valley ranging from 20 to 40 feet above sea level and surrounded by steep, wooded hillsides, up to 1,000 feet high. The water from the Hanalei River is diverted into an east and west supply ditch. It then flows northwest and irrigates approximately 75 acres of wetland impoundments, 180 acres of taro patches, and 90 acres of wet pasture before returning to the river. Hanalei NWR is closed to the public to minimize disturbance and protect endangered waterbirds.

Chickens

The nene is the official state bird . . . but the unofficial bird of Kauai is the chicken, or "moa." Feral chickens are EVERYWHERE here. And I mean . . . everywhere. They're in parks, in parking lots, in restaurants, at churches, in shopping centers, at the beach, in the airport . . . and, yes . . . crossing the road!

I asked the gardeners who take care of our condo complex how many chickens they think are usually on our property. Although the numbers vary greatly, they guess that the average is 30 chickens and 15 roosters!



Some good things about the chickens are that they eat insects and centipedes, and they help fertilize the gardens. They also entertain the tourists and provide photo ops for them. Some bad things are that they are dirty and messy and can be flea-infested. Plus the roosters have no concept of "dawn." They crow all night and all day.

Where did these chickens come from? Moa were originally brought to Kauai in canoes by the first Polynesian voyagers. Since the time of Captain Cook, the moa have been crossbreeding with common barnyard domesticated chickens. Due to Hurricane Iwa in 1982 and Hurricane Iniki in 1992, many chicken farms and backyard chicken pens were destroyed and the chickens "flew the coop" and were scattered across the island by the strong winds. Since their only predators are dogs, cats, and cars, their numbers keep growing.

Very, very few people here actually eat feral chickens, because the meat is tough and stringy. I've heard two similar recipes for cooking them.

#1. *Put the chicken in a large pot of water, along with a lava rock. Boil until the rock is tender.*

#2. *Put the chicken in a large pot of water, along with a lava rock. Boil for 3 days. Eat the rock.*

I'll tell you about more birds here on the island in my next Kauai article.