



PAPA HĀNAUMOKUĀKEA Marine National Monument

NEWS RELEASE
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NEWS RELEASE

Second Voyage to Move Endangered Millerbirds Departs Honolulu

(Honolulu, HI) To save one of the United States' rarest bird species from extinction, a group of biologists set sail today for the remote northwestern Hawaiian island of Nihoa, where they will attempt to catch a group of endangered Millerbirds and move them to Laysan Island some 650 miles away.

This is the second such translocation being attempted by the team from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), American Bird Conservancy (ABC), and other organizations in an effort to restore Millerbirds to Laysan Island within the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge and Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and World Heritage site.

Millerbirds have been absent from Laysan for almost a century as a result of habitat destruction due to introduced rabbits and other livestock. The last of these animals were removed in the early 20th Century. FWS has been working to restore Laysan's native vegetation for more than two decades. A self-sustaining Millerbird population on Laysan will ensure that the species is no longer vulnerable to extinction from a catastrophic event on Nihoa such as a hurricane or the accidental introduction of an alien predator or disease.

Last year, 24 Millerbirds were moved from Nihoa in the first, highly successful translocation of this species. Since their release on Laysan on September 10, 2011, this pioneer group of birds has survived and thrived, producing 17 young.

“The reproductive success of the first group of birds moved to Laysan is very encouraging and demonstrates that Laysan is quite a hospitable island for Millerbirds from Nihoa,” said Sheila Conant of the University of Hawai‘i, who pioneered the study of the Millerbird in the 1980s and is a member of this year’s translocation team. “This second translocation will provide this tiny, new population with the best chance of flourishing. The reestablishment of Millerbirds on Laysan is an extraordinary and long-needed step in the species’ recovery. This type of restoration work is sorely needed for other Hawaiian birds.”

The team of experienced biologists departing from Honolulu today hopes to capture 26 birds on Nihoa Island and transport them to Laysan, bringing the total number of “founder” Millerbirds to 50—the target number set by the conservation team for giving the species the best possible chance of establishing a self-sustaining population on Laysan.





PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA Marine National Monument

“We are pleased and excited that our intensive restoration work on Laysan over two decades has facilitated the reintroduction of Millerbirds to the island, a quantum leap in that restoration,” said Don Palawski, Acting FWS Superintendent of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, which encompasses the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

During the voyage from Nihoa to Laysan aboard the vessel *M/V Searcher*, the Millerbirds will be accompanied by a Native Hawaiian cultural liaison, and cared for by avian husbandry experts and a wildlife veterinarian from the U.S. Geological Survey. The itinerary includes several days on Nihoa to capture the birds and acclimate them to captivity prior to the three-day sea voyage to Laysan, and two days on Laysan to release the birds and initiate radio-tracking of their movements. One biologist will remain on Laysan through the winter to monitor the newly released Millerbirds, the young produced in 2012, and the adults translocated in 2011.

“Everyone is excited and encouraged by the promising results of the first translocation, and looking forward to the second movement of birds,” said George Wallace, ABC Vice President for Oceans and Islands. “We have a talented and committed team of professionals on the project, and above all, we have Millerbirds! They have exceeded all our expectations so far by handling captivity well, eating readily, and adapting very rapidly to their new environment on Laysan.”

“The Hawaiian Islands present some of the greatest conservation challenges on Earth,” said Sheldon Plentovich, FWS Coastal Program Coordinator for the Pacific Islands, and lead biologist on the Millerbird project. “The success of this project stands as an outstanding example of what can be achieved through dedicated teamwork, careful planning, and passion for conservation. We all look forward to learning more about Millerbird biology and ecology so that we can become better stewards of these birds and these islands.”

The Millerbird, which weighs less than an ounce, is a lively gray and brown bird that forages for insects among low shrubs and bunch-grasses. On Laysan, it joins the Laysan Finch, Laysan Duck, Hawaiian monk seal, several endangered plant species, and millions of nesting seabirds.

Close observation of the first group of translocated Millerbirds over the past eleven months has yielded significant new scientific information about the species, such as details of breeding chronology, the fact that pairs can produce more than one brood in a season, and a still-emerging picture of how young birds mature and enter the breeding population. All this information is important in assessing the progress toward population establishment on Laysan and is valuable in the conservation and management of the species. The success to date indicates that Laysan has suitable habitat and other food resources to support Millerbirds.

As a co-manager of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and World Heritage Site, the FWS is proud to lead this project in collaboration with the American Bird Conservancy. We are grateful for the support and assistance from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the





PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA Marine National Monument

University of New Brunswick, University of Hawai‘i, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) National Wildlife Health Research Center, and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs.

To learn more about the Millerbird project and read updates from Laysan, visit www.fws.gov/pacificislands/ and www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/oceansandislands/hawaii.html.

Note: Project images can be downloaded from the following site:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwspacific/sets/72157627685823012/detail/>

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Papahānaumokuākea is cooperatively managed to ensure ecological integrity and achieve strong, long-term protection and perpetuation of Northwestern Hawaiian Island ecosystems, Native Hawaiian culture, and heritage resources for current and future generations. Three co-trustees - the Department of Commerce, Department of the Interior, and State of Hawai‘i - joined by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, protect this special place. Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument was inscribed as the first mixed (natural and cultural) UNESCO World Heritage Site in the United States in July 2010. For more information, please visit www.papahanaumokuakea.gov.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our [Facebook page](#), follow our [tweets](#), watch our [YouTube Channel](#), and download photos from our [Flickr page](#).

American Bird Conservancy (ABC) is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit membership organization whose mission is to conserve native birds and their habitats throughout the Americas. ABC acts by safeguarding the rarest species, conserving and restoring habitats, and reducing threats, while building capacity in the bird conservation movement. Visit us at www.abcbirds.org and on [Facebook](#).

