

News Release



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Nihoa Millerbird Recovery Team Honored for Achievements

A team of biologists, avian experts and a veterinarian have been honored as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Recovery Champions for their historic reintroduction of endangered Millerbirds to Hawai'i's Laysan Island after a 100-year absence, a major step forward to save the species from extinction.

Six months after 24 of the tiny Millerbirds were relocated in September 2011 from their last remaining holdout on Nihoa Island to Laysan Island. Some of the birds have laid eggs and some of the eggs have hatched. This is an encouraging sign that the birds will thrive in their new home within the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.

“This project will reduce the chances that catastrophic events such as hurricanes or the introduction of invasive predators will extirpate the species, since there will be independent populations of Millerbirds on two islands, 650 miles apart,” said Loyal Mehrhoff, Field Supervisor for the Service’s Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office.

The Millerbird relocation team is among the recipients of the Service’s 2011 Recovery Champion award, which honors Service employees and partners for outstanding efforts to conserve and protect endangered and threatened species of fish, wildlife and plants. Nationwide, the Service honored a total of 56 teams and nine individuals as Recovery Champions for work to conserve species ranging from the Millerbird in the Pacific to the spotfin chub in North Carolina.

“Recovery Champions are helping listed species get to the point at which they are secure in the wild and no longer need Endangered Species Act protection,” said Service Director Dan Ashe. “These groups and individuals have done amazing work in helping to bring dozens of species back from the brink of extinction, while improving habitat that benefits many other species and local communities.”

Moving Millerbirds to Laysan has been identified as an important recovery action for decades. This first translocation was the result of more than five years of research and detailed planning by biologists and resource managers, led by a partnership between the Service and the American Bird Conservancy (ABC). The award was given to 19 team members from the Service, ABC, Pacific Rim Conservation (PRC) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

The Nihoa Team members are: Walterbea Aldeguer - cultural monitor; Fred Amidon, Holly Freifeld, Sheldon Plentovich and Rachel Rounds - biologists with the Service; George Wallace and Chris Farmer –

ABC biologists; Robby Kohley, Cameron Rutt, and Daniel Tsukayama – contractors with ABC; Peter Luscomb - aviculturist; Eric VanderWerf and Lindsay Young - PRC biologists; Dr. Thierry Work - USGS veterinarian; and the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument co-trustees and staff - Tom Edgerton, Lauren Greig, Michele Kuter, Tawn Speetjens and Matt Stelmach - responsible for the management of the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge.

The Nihoa Millerbird - a species of Old World warbler endemic to Hawai'i - weighs less than an ounce, and is a lively brown song bird that forages for insects among low shrubs and bunch-grasses. Millerbirds have been absent from Laysan for nearly 100 years after a closely related subspecies went extinct in the early 20th Century.

The birds were kept in specially designed cages for four to six days between their capture on Nihoa and their release on Laysan. Each bird carries a unique combination of colored leg bands to allow identification in the field, and half the birds were fitted with temporary radio transmitters so that their locations could be determined during their first three weeks in their new home. Biologists will remain on Laysan until at least September 2012 to monitor the birds' movements and behaviors, including their recent first nestlings and, the team hopes, successful fledging of chicks. The biologists publish a blog on their sightings and experiences at <http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands/nihoamillerbird.html> . Links to more information and photos and video clips from the translocation can be found here as well.

“This was truly a team effort that required extensive and seamless cooperation between many experts in their fields,” said Sarah Hall, the Service's recovery coordinator.

The team offered special recognition to the captain and crew of the *M/V Searcher*, the support vessel for the translocation, for their key role in the project's success. “This was a first-time effort, and everyone had a lot to learn,” team member Holly Freifeld said. “In addition to safely and efficiently transporting the Nihoa Millerbird Team, gear and Nihoa Millerbirds to and between islands, Captain Jonathan Littenberg, Barbara and Richard Littenberg, Noah Nugent, Gillian Wysock and Kendrick Karas worked closely with the team prior to and throughout the trip to identify and creatively resolve a myriad of challenges and problems. Working with the Littenbergs and *Searcher* crew has added significant value to the Millerbird translocation project, and their warmth and generosity invested last year's expedition with true aloha.”

Additional recognition should also be given to Pamela Kringel, purchasing agent for the Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office, for her significant contribution and logistical support that helped make this project a success.

For more information about the 2011 Recovery Champions, please visit:
<http://www.fws.gov/angered/what-we-do/recovery-champions/index.html>.

America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. To learn more about the Service's Endangered Species program, go to <http://www.fws.gov/angered/>.

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