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STORIES FROM HAWAIIAN AIRLINES



**THE HEAD OF THE OCTOPUS** A Cook Islands idyll

**LEI-ING IT ON THICK** Hawai'i's over-the-top tradition of graduation lei **LONG LIVE THE QUEEN**

Moana Jones Wong earns her crown at Pipeline

## Birds, Bees and Beyond



Naturalist Alan Silva (seen above left) not only guides tours on rewilded land at Hōkūala, Kaua'i, he's helped restore habitat and breed native wildlife like the nēnē (seen above right), Hawai'i's state bird, which was once on the edge of extinction.

If you go birdwatching at Hōkūala, prepare to be inspired. Alan Silva, the resident naturalist for Timbers Resort at Hōkūala on Kaua'i's southeastern shore, isn't called "the Birdman" for nothing. He spent thirty years as a biologist technician for the Hawai'i state Division of Forestry and Wildlife, working in Midway and the Marianas as well as Hawai'i. Now the warm and engaging biologist shares his extensive knowledge at Hōkūala.

But Silva isn't just helping birders tick species off their life lists; he's been growing the flock: He nurtured a group of fifteen endemic nēnē—Hawaiian geese—to a mighty gaggle of more than eight hundred. (In the 1980s, there were fewer than thirty of the Hawai'i state birds living on all of Kaua'i).

Binoculars and bird identification sheet in hand, Silva leads groups around the grounds of a mega resort formerly roamed by zebras, monkeys and gazelles. Today, on 16.5 acres of rewilded land that was once an eighteen-hole golf course,

you might see some sixty bird species, six of which are endemic and endangered: koloa (ducks), ae'o (stilts), 'alae 'ula (mud hens), pueo (short-eared owls), 'alae kea (gallinules) and, of course, his beloved nēnē. Silva once rescued an abandoned egg and raised the gosling, teaching it to eat and swim, he says. It slept next to his ear and talked all night. "But I had no idea I would be doing this as a career," he says.

There are plenty of introduced species as well: zebra doves, Brazilian cardinals, nutmeg mannikins, strawberry finches. Noisy as the mynah birds are, Silva says they can have a 120-word vocabulary. Hōkūala abuts Līhu'e Airport, and keeping the birds off the runway is a career in itself. "It's a good job if you can get it," Silva laughs. "A lot of your time is literally sitting in one spot watching a flock of birds."

Silva's work is one part of a property-wide conservation and sustainability effort at Hōkūala. Mike Yulo, a local beekeeper, maintains twenty hives on the property, pollinating Hōkūala's organic

farm and orchard. The bees literally saved Yulo's life. When floods swept his truck off the road near Keālia in 2018, he escaped through the window, anchoring himself with a five-pound pail of honey until he was able to pull himself out of the raging current. Today Yulo supplies the farm with jams and balms produced from the nectar of coffee, macadamia, lemon, basil, spinach, rosemary and thyme and even native 'ōhi'a trees growing at higher elevations in Kōke'e State Park. With all of Kaua'i's abundance, it's not uncommon for Yulo's hives to produce four or five hundred pounds of honey.

Hōkūala's meandering walking paths are open to the public, and Silva leads his free tours four days a week. "It's gratifying to see both kids and adults become excited about what they've experienced," Silva says, "and ignite a passion for conservation."