

This article was first published in the September 2018 issue of the Sylvia Woods Harp Center e-Newsletter. It is part of Sylvia's ongoing series about living on Kauai, Hawaii.

## Birds of Kauai, Vol. 2

This is the second article in my series about the birds on Kauai.

For many people in the U.S., September means one thing . . . the start of football season! And for some, Friday nights are saved for high school football games. However, this hasn't been the case here on Kauai for the past 7 seasons. Read on to find out the reason why . . .

### Shearwaters

There are two species of shearwater birds that nest on Kauai: the wedge-tailed shearwater, and the endangered Newell's shearwater, or 'a'o. Ninety percent of the worldwide population of 'a'o birds breed on Kauai. Shearwater chicks, or fledglings, make their maiden voyage to sea between September and November, and remain at sea for two to three years before returning. Fledglings rely on natural light to navigate on their first flights and can become very disoriented by bright lights. "Fallout" is the term for these fledglings who are grounded by lights. They are then unable to become airborne again, and are vulnerable to injury or death.



"Shearwater aid stations," which look like a bank of cubby holes, are found in front of many fire stations here on Kauai during the fall. Through the "Save Our Shearwaters (SOS)" program, residents are instructed to carefully pick up downed birds and transport them to the Humane Society or one of these aid stations. According to the Kauai Humane Society website: "Since SOS was created by the state in 1979, volunteers and residents have collected 31,224 seabirds -- 92% of which were recovered and released."

So . . . what does this have to do with football?

Unfortunately, fledging season happens during football season. The bright lights of our main football stadium were causing a large number of birds to experience fallout. Because the 'a'o are an endangered species, federal and state laws mandate that the Kauai Interscholastic Federation could be fined from \$10,000 to \$30,000 for each bird that dies. And so, starting in 2010, all high school football games on Kauai were moved from Friday nights to Saturday afternoons. Since then, Kauai county has spent millions retrofitting ballpark lights in county parks. They're also evaluating breeding cycle timing and moon phases to decide which football games could be played at night without endangering the birds. In 2017 four games were played on Friday nights. This season, three September games were held on Fridays, but all October and November games will be held on Saturday afternoons.

The shearwater photo is from the [Save Our Shearwaters](#) program of the Kauai Humane Society.