

‘Iwi (*Drepanis coccinea*, scarlet Hawaiian honeycreeper)

‘Apelila (April) 2024

Description

- Adults are about six inches long with a bright red body and black wings and tail.¹
- Bills are long, curved, and peach-colored.
- Juveniles (‘iwi pōlena) are mottled with yellow, brown, and black until they molt into their adult plumage at around two years old.²



Distribution

- Endemic; threatened.
- Historically widespread and occurred on all main Hawaiian islands.
- Currently found in native forests above 4,000 feet on Kaua‘i, Maui, and Hawai‘i.²
- Threats include habitat loss, climate change, avian malaria, and rapid ‘ōhi‘a death.



‘Ōlelo No‘eau

Ho‘okolo aku i ka nui manu.³
–Go inquire of the other birds.

In mo‘olelo (story), ‘elepaio blames others for his mistakes. Finally, after consulting with his friends (‘io, pueo, ‘i‘iwi, ‘ō‘ō, and ‘amakihī), he takes a deeper look within himself and learns a valuable lesson.



Cultural Significance

Traditionally, different methods were used for catching forest birds to harvest feathers. One method utilized the interdependent relationship between nectar-sipping birds and tubular or bell-shaped flowers. For example, kia manu (bird catchers) would hide in a shrub, stick out their hand holding an ‘ōhāwai flower, and wait. Once an ‘iwi inserted its beak into the flower and started sipping, the kia manu would gently pinch the beak with his fingers, pluck a few feathers, then set the bird free.



¹<https://mauiforestbirds.org/iwi/>. ²<https://abcbirds.org/bird/iwi/>. ³Pukui 1983.