

Help for Hawaii's Offshore Islets

Partners pool resources to eradicate introduced species

BY KEN FOOTE

Hawaii is known for its spectacular natural beauty, enticing millions of people a year to visit the islands to enjoy clear blue waters, cascading waterfalls, and lush green forests. What many visitors and some residents do not realize is that Hawaii is a fragile image of its former self.

Though plagued with a myriad of environmental threats, non-native invasive species continue to be the greatest single threat to Hawaii's wildlife and their habitats. Hawaii has more than 300 endangered or threatened species, representing almost one quarter of the nation's listed species. Many are imperiled because of competition with or predation by introduced species. How can native species be protected and restored? The answer involves partnership and outreach!

In 2002, a group of natural resource professionals came together to form the Offshore Islet Restoration Committee, or OIRC. The OIRC recognized that Hawaii's offshore islets are the last refuge for many of the state's rare coastal species and can serve as examples to educate people about the Hawaii of old.

The OIRC is comprised of representatives from the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources, the Service, Bishop Museum, The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Geological Survey's Biological Resources Division, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Pele Polynesia, the National Tropical Botanical Garden, and the University of Hawaii.

Early on, the OIRC recognized the need for and importance of effective

outreach to influence the diverse groups that use Hawaii's offshore islets. Guided by a five-year outreach plan, members and volunteers have produced a variety of helpful materials, from informational fact sheets to a comprehensive web site (currently under revision).

Several educational products target specific user groups. For instance, a poster entitled "Fishing with Friends" reaches out to people who fish, showing the seabirds they may encounter,

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OIRC volunteer Naomi Sugimura standing next to one of the Mokulua signs (Mokulua islet). Ms. Sugimura designed graphics for the sign.

how seabirds benefit fishermen, and what they can do to ensure the seabirds' survival. In order to target recreational kayakers, a laminated informational card was designed to attach to rental kayaks. The card describes common native and invasive species they may encounter on the islets, and proper behavior to ensure the protection of native species.

A 2005 Earth Day event held on the island of Oahu was another outreach highpoint. For the past two years, fourth and fifth grade students from Lanikai School heard about scientific research on the Mokulua islets and experienced hands-on activities to learn about native versus introduced species, insect ecology, adaptation,

and Hawaii's coastal ecosystem. The students designed two signs to provide visitors with information about the plant and animal communities on the islets and to show what islet visitors can do to help eliminate or reduce potential negative impacts. On Earth Day, a morning assembly honored the students and unveiled the signs with a traditional Hawaiian blessing. Afterwards, the students took a boat ride to the islets to place the signs and enjoy the fruits of their labor.

What's next for the OIRC? With the Service, they will break new ground on Lehua Island, north of Kauai, with the proposed eradication of small mammals using new techniques that have proven effective in other areas, such as New Zealand. The island supports more than 25,000 pairs of breeding seabirds of at least eight species, as well as the largest colony of brown boobies in Hawaii. Unfortunately, rats, rabbits, and other invasive species have limited the wildlife potential of the island.

As with the other projects, we plan a significant outreach campaign to ensure that area residents understand the eradication effort and to gain support for returning Lehua to a more natural condition. In the years to come, the OIRC hopes to strengthen its outreach efforts with additional funding and eventually, hire a full-time outreach specialist. For more information on the OIRC visit the web site at <http://www.botany.hawaii.edu/gradstud/eijzenga/oirc/>. ●

Ken Foote is an information and education specialist in the Pacific Islands External Affairs Office.



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Teacher Donna Therrien and University of Hawaii grad student Sheldon Plentovich present students with certificates of appreciation at the Earth day assembly held at Lanikai Elementary School.

FISHING WITH FRIENDS



"Fishing with Friends" poster designed by OIRC volunteer Naomi Sugimura.