



**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**

## News Release

*Pacific Islands External Affairs Office*

300 Ala Moana Blvd., Room 5-311 Box 50187, Honolulu, HI 96850  
Phone: 808 792-9530 Fax: 808 792-9583

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Contact: Ken Foote, 808 792 9535 or 282 9442

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### **Caution Hawai'i Island Motorists – Your Actions Mean Life or Death to the Nēnē!**

Conservationists around the State are alarmed by the recent deaths of Hawai'i's State bird, the nēnē. Since June 2007, five endangered nēnē or Hawaiian geese have been killed by cars on Saddle Road with the most recent death on August 8. The Hawai'i Island road passes between Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea – the island's largest peaks.

An area of special concern is located between mile markers 29 and 30. The old pastures along both sides of the road serve as a gathering place for nēnē. Birds are attracted to the grasses and also the gravel (used for grit) along the roadway. Most of the birds that are found in this area are believed to have bred at Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge.

“The number of vehicle collisions with nēnē on Saddle Road is alarming and warrants increased attention and caution by all who care for Hawai'i's majestic State bird,” said Hakalau Forest NWR biologist Jack Jeffrey. “From now through October, we expect to see more birds in the area as they flock together before moving on to their breeding grounds in Hakalau Forest. This area may have served as a flocking site for many years, but until the recent Saddle Road construction and realignment, was not a problem area for road kills.”

Scientists, land managers, and concerned citizens are trying to protect nēnē from vehicle collisions, but there are no fast and easy solutions to this problem. Possible long-term solutions range from fences (of various designs and arrangements) and vegetation buffers to possible hazing methods used to repel the birds from the dangerous roadway.

In the meantime, motorists are encouraged to take extra caution while driving in areas occupied by nēnē. The Saddle Road and other areas throughout the State are marked with warning signs indicating the possibility of nēnē on the roadway. Any driver who sees a warning sign and/or observes nēnē near or on the roadway should:

- keep a look-out for birds in the area so you are not taken by surprise;
- slow down and take some time to appreciate the bird; and
- be prepared to come to a sudden stop or turn to avoid birds.

Listed as endangered in 1967, the nēnē is the eighth most endangered waterfowl species in the world. It shares a common ancestry with the Canada goose. In 1952, the remaining nēnē population was estimated to be about 30 birds. Current estimates are around 2,000 birds in different populations on the islands of Hawai'i, Maui, Moloka'i, and Kaua'i.

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Unique to the Hawaiian Islands, this medium-sized goose grows up to 27 inches tall and 5.5 pounds in weight. Throughout the centuries, the nēnē has adapted to terrestrial life with greatly reduced webbing between the toes, smaller wings and larger legs.

The nēnē persists today due to intensive habitat management, protection from predators, and strict enforcement against those who kill or harm the birds. The Endangered Species Act prohibits killing or harming nēnē and provides for penalties ranging from \$500 up to \$50,000, depending on circumstances, and/or imprisonment of up to one year.

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**Note to Editors:** Images are available by calling Ken Foote at 808 792 9535