



MEDIA RELEASE

## **New Survey Reveals Further Decline of Endangered Hawaiian Songbird - Conservation Actions Ramp Up**

(Washington, D.C. and Honolulu, HI September 14, 2010) The endangered Palila (*Loxioides bailleui*), a beautiful songbird native to Hawai'i, continues its dramatic drop in numbers according to a new survey by the United States Geological Survey under the auspices of the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW).

The species is restricted to the island of Hawai'i, where its population has decreased by nearly 75% over the last seven years from about 4,400 birds in the core area in 2003 to about 1,200 birds in the 2010 survey.

"These latest figures tell us that it is imperative that we act quickly to protect this bird now. We know what needs to be done to protect this species, and every day that goes by without those actions being implemented brings the species one step closer to extinction," said George Wallace, Vice President for Oceans and Islands of American Bird Conservancy (ABC).

The Palila's downward population slide is a result of habitat degradation, predation, and severe drought conditions. The ongoing drought is causing reductions in food supply, and climate change is an emerging threat. The native māmane and naio forests upon which the Palila depends have been degraded by introduced ungulates, especially mouflon, mouflon-sheep hybrids, and goats.

Non-native, feral cats prey on adults and nestlings. Green seeds from the māmane tree make up most of the Palila's diet, but māmane flowers, buds, and leaves, and naio berries are also consumed, especially when māmane seeds are scarce. Green māmane seeds also support caterpillars that are fed to Palila nestlings. Thus annual Palila reproduction is tied to māmane seed pod availability and the overall quality of the māmane forest.

The conservation community is responding to the Palila's urgent needs. The DLNR Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW), with critical support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), has begun construction of a fence to encircle the majority of Critical Habitat designated for the Palila on Mauna Kea under the Endangered Species Act. Once the fence is complete, exotic ungulates will be eradicated from the area and prevented from re-entering. In 2009, FWS provided \$900,000 to DOFAW for fence construction. In a recent announcement, FWS committed to providing an additional \$1.447 million in 2010.

"This is a fantastic contribution to a vital conservation effort," said Paul Conry, DOFAW Administrator. "The new funding support will allow us to construct nearly half of the fence. Completion of the fence and true protection of Palila critical habitat is in sight."

Constructing and maintaining fence lines in Hawai'i's rugged mountain terrain is both difficult and expensive. With few roads, supplies, equipment, and crews often must be transported by helicopter. Varying terrain makes the work labor-intensive, and construction costs may run as high as \$75,000 per mile for this fence.

The new funding comes in part from a special allocation stimulated by a report entitled *The State of the Birds – United States of America 2009* ([www.stateofthebirds.org](http://www.stateofthebirds.org)) and championed by Senator Daniel Inouye (D-Hawai'i). The report, produced by a broad alliance of federal agencies and conservation organizations, including FWS and ABC, drew special attention to the plight of Hawaiian birds and the urgency for immediate action to protect them from extinction.

"FWS is committed to working with our partners to conserve Hawai'i's remaining imperiled birds," said Loyal Mehrhoff, field supervisor for the agency's Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office. "The Palila exemplifies one of several species that need our help now, and the most important thing we can do is protect their habitat."

"We must do everything we can - working with Congress and federal and state agencies - to raise the funding needed to complete the Mauna Kea fence," added Wallace.

When complete, the six-foot-high fence will be 59 miles long, enclose 94% of Palila Critical Habitat on Mauna Kea, and allow native māmane trees to regenerate without damage from sheep or goats.

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Contact: Robert Johns, 202-234-7181 ext.210, [bjohns@abcbirds.org](mailto:bjohns@abcbirds.org) [www.abcbirds.org](http://www.abcbirds.org)  
Deborah Ward, 808 587-0320, [deborah.l.ward@hawaii.gov](mailto:deborah.l.ward@hawaii.gov) <http://hawaii.gov/dlnr/dofaw>  
Barbara Maxfield, 808- 792-9531, [barbara\\_maxfield@fws.gov](mailto:barbara_maxfield@fws.gov) [www.fws.gov/pacificislands](http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands)

## **FACTS ABOUT PALILA RESTORATION EFFORTS:**

ABC and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, as part of the Foundation's Hawai'i Forest Bird Keystone Initiative, are also supporting predator control in the core Palila area on the southwestern slopes of Mauna Kea, and habitat restoration in the form of the control of fountain grass, which increases the frequency and intensity of fires, and Cape ivy, a climbing vine that reduces the vigor of native trees.

Funds from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act have supported additional restoration activities, including invasive weed control and the planting of 25,000 seedlings on Mauna Kea's northern slope to increase the amount of forest that will eventually be available to the Palila.

The māmane-naio forest is also threatened by persistent drought conditions, and threat of wildfires, such as the one that burned 1,387 acres of Palila Critical Habitat on the southern slope of Mauna Kea during late August and early September. DOFAW, FWS, the U.S. Army's Pōhakuloa Training Area, and other stakeholders are working on a comprehensive fire management plan for this area.

The Palila, which stands about 6-7 inches high, has a heavy finch-like bill for breaking open seeds, and a striking yellow head and breast. It has been extirpated from over 90% of its historical range, which once included the slopes of the Mauna Loa and Hualālai volcanoes on Hawai'i. The Palila is one of 17 surviving members of the Hawaiian honeycreeper family, a diverse group of birds that evolved from a single ancestral species. Forty-two other species of the honeycreeper family are now extinct or feared to be extinct.

American Bird Conservancy conserves native birds and their habitats throughout the Americas by safeguarding the rarest species, conserving and restoring habitats, and reducing threats while building capacity of the bird conservation movement. ABC is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit membership organization that is consistently awarded a top, four-star rating by the independent group, Charity Navigator.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).

DLNR's mission is to "Enhance, protect, conserve and manage Hawai'i's unique and limited natural, cultural and historic resources held in public trust for current and future generations of visitors and the people of Hawai'i nei in partnership with others from the public and private sectors." The Division of Forestry and Wildlife is responsible for the management of state-owned forests, natural areas, public hunting areas, and plant and wildlife sanctuaries. Program areas cover watershed protection; native resources protection, including unique ecosystems and endangered species of plants and wildlife; outdoor recreation; and commercial forestry.