

# Po‘ouli (Hawaiian black-faced honeycreeper, *Melamprosops phaeosoma*)

June (June) 2024

## Description<sup>1</sup>

- Medium-sized, weighed less than an ounce.
- Black-masked, brown body; males were cream colored under and females were gray.
- Wings were short and rounded; tails so short almost appeared tailless.
- Only member of its genus, *Melamprosops*.



Photo: Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project

## Distribution

- First known encounter in 1973, NE slope of Haleakalā.<sup>2</sup>
- Limited known history and observation, but appeared to prefer to nest in native ‘ōhi‘a (*Metrosideros polymorpha*) trees.
- Foraged on tree branches for snails and arthropods.
- Declared extinct by the IUCN in 2019.<sup>3</sup>
- Removed from Endangered Species List in November 2023 due to extinction.<sup>4</sup>



Photo credit: Paul Baker/USFWS

## Cultural Significance

Its original indigenous name unknown and no mo‘olelo, oli, or mele reference found, its role and significance in Hawaiian culture remain to be acknowledged. Perhaps Mary Kawena Pūku‘i did not only reference its physical appearance, po‘o (head) and uli (dark), but provided kaona (hidden meaning) in use of po-/pō- (time or state) or pō (realm of the gods) and uli/‘ōuli (omen) as birds are the messengers from akua (gods).



Photo credit: Paul Baker/USFWS

## ‘Ōlelo No‘eau

*Hāhai nō ka ua i ka ululā‘au,*  
“The rain follows the forest.”<sup>5</sup>

*Ola i ka wai*  
“Water is life.”

Together, these two sayings remind us of how we and the forest birds, who are our ‘ohana (family), all depend on the health of the forest.



Photo credit: Paul Baker/USFWS

<sup>1</sup><https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/poouli/cur/identification>; <sup>2</sup><https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/wildlife/birds/poouli/>;

<sup>3</sup><https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/22720863/153774712>; <sup>4</sup>88 Fed. Reg. 71644, Oct. 17, 2023; Pūku‘i, ‘Ōlelo No‘eau #405.