

Earth Day – Hawaiian Bird Protection

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Adult Female Kiwikiu

Photo credit: Bret Nainoa Mossman

Greetings, Bozho, dear listeners. I greet you in the language of my Potawatomi ancestors and my tribe today. I am Randy Kritkausky, co-host of the show, along with Carolyn Schmidt.

This episode of Indigenous Perspectives originates, not from my tribal homelands, but from N’dakinna, the un-ceded traditional territory of the Abenaki people, who for thousands of years were settled, and were the stewards on the lands to be found here in the state of Vermont in the Northeastern United States, and across the Canadian border in Southern Québec province.

Carolyn Schmidt: We begin the program by acknowledging where we come from - both culturally and geographically - as this program, “Indigenous Perspectives”, focuses on understanding our roots in Mother Earth and connections with our ancestors.

Randy: Today's show celebrates Earth Day. For all of us on Mother Earth, every day should be Earth Day. Indeed, for those of us who have indigenous ancestry, every day on earth is Earth Day, as we are more or less in continual intimate contact with the natural world around us. I say “more or less” in continual contact because the reality of life and a world turned upside down by colonial history is that indigenous people have been repeatedly displaced and relocated. Like many of our natural kin: the winged ones, the rooted ones, the four legged, we often struggle to maintain nurturing connections with the earth. That struggle is the theme of today's show.

Carolyn: Our guest today is Bret Nainoa Mossman, who is joining us from Hawai‘i. Bret is by profession an avian field biologist. He is also Hawaiian, or Kānaka Maoli, and that is one of the categories of indigenous peoples, which under U.S. law also includes Native American Indians and Alaskan Natives. Bret, welcome, and thank you for being our guest. Can you start by telling us a bit about your connections to Hawai‘i? You mentioned that you have not always lived on Hawai‘i.

Bret Nainoa Mossman: Aloha, Carolyn and Randy, and mahalo [*thank you*] for having me on the show. Just to get started, actually growing up, I grew up in a little town in Utah called Heber City, which is in Eastern Shoshone territory. So I spent most of my younger years away from the islands. But my dad grew up here [*in Hawai‘i*], and so he always had a vested interest in trying to get us home to visit as often as possible.

And then I was also fortunate to be able to participate in the Ho‘omāka‘ika‘i Explorations Program through the Kamehameha Schools. And that was really great because it gave me my first real introduction into Hawaiian culture and into Hawaiian practices. And it was also the first place where I came into contact with Hawaiian birds. I didn't really know it at the time, but it had a pretty big, big impact on me, going forward. So fast forward a little bit into about ninth grade. I remember. So I did explorations in fifth and sixth grade. And then in about ninth grade, I remember we had our biology textbook and there was one of those classic, you know, like the Darwin's finches heads of

birds, but instead of the Darwin's finches, it was the Hawaiian finches.

And there was this one paragraph that just talked about all this extinction that occurred in the islands. I just remember, that kind of hit me cause it just kind of brought that memory back from Explorations of looking through the booklet that they gave us. And there was one page that had three drawings of different birds. There was the mamō, the 'i'iwi and the 'ō'ō, and all three of those birds, they were just drawings. And I was really confused. Like why, why are these just drawings? Because in that same time, we went to the Bishop Museum and saw these amazing 'ahu 'ula - they're like incredible feather capes - and artistry and, kāhili and other things that were made from these birds. And like, so it was just like, there was so many of them, you know, like why is there just drawings?

And in that textbook in ninth grade, it said Hawai'i was the extinction capital of the world and this bird, this bird, this bird were all gone. And so that kind of inspired some research on my part. And I went and looked back and saw that of those three birds that were pictured in that book, the mamō and the 'ō'ō were extinct. And in fact, the only remaining forest bird that was used very extensively in feather work was the 'i'iwi. And so I think that's what really kind of woke me up into the struggles of things that are happening. And then it also kind of brought into my perspective, the really deeply seated loss of our connection to our birds. Because frankly, they're just gone, you know? And so if we're going to preserve that we have to do everything we can to preserve just these last remnants of our once really diverse avian community that we had.

Randy: That's a beautiful story about once again, nature being the messengers that are a big part of our awakening to our own heritage. It's a story that just keeps coming out again and again, on this program. Native Americans have experienced centuries of colonization, displacement, forced assimilation, relocation. Have indigenous Hawaiians had a similar history or is it a different history?

Bret Nainoa Mossman: I think it's definitely a different history. And we escaped some of it just because it took longer for Europeans to find our islands. But we've definitely experienced a lot of the same hardships and a lot of the same struggles. Especially even like - we were never forcefully displaced at the level that Native American tribes were on the U.S. continent - but now in kind of more of a modern sense as more and more - like, over a third of the land in Hawai'i now is owned by people that do not, that are not from here. And so as that continues to progress and that continues to get worse, more and more native Hawaiians are being forced out of their lands today. Mostly moving to the U S mainland. There are some programs that do attempt to provide a native Hawaiian homeland, it's called the Division of Hawaiian Homelands, or DHL; it's a state run program.

It's kind of different. So Hawaiians are not a federally recognized Native American tribe or native people. And so that kind of adds to the whole conflict of it; in essence, there isn't really a set area where Hawaiians have claim. I mean, technically by U.N. decree, we have claim to the whole islands, but in the current state of occupation, more and more Hawaiians are getting pushed out of Hawai'i then can stay. And in fact, I think in 2018 for the first time, there are more Hawaiians living on the U.S. continent than there are here in Hawaii. So I think that kind of speaks like we didn't have to suffer through the forced displacement that happened historically, we're currently living through this more modern displacement that these people coming in and buying the land and causing the prices in this place to increase is slowly forcing us out of our Homeland.

Randy: So just to back up for a moment, you made a really interesting point and I need to have it clarified for me. because my understanding is that within some legal frameworks in the United States, Hawaiians are considered to be one of the three indigenous groups. On the other hand, you're correct; you are not under the same statutes that existed long before you became a state. So you don't in a strange way benefit from being sovereign nations. You're just people on the land. That produces particular dilemmas for you, does it not?

Bret: Yeah, exactly. I think that if anything, it creates a lot of division within the Hawaiian community, because there's all these different ideas for what - there's a lot of people that want just sovereignty now, want to restore the kingdom, go in that direction. Then there's a whole other section of people that want to seek federal recognition and get our own sovereignty. And then there's a lot of people that fall in between that. And then there's another group that are talking about trying to restore the crown lands to Hawaiians, because there used to be in before, like in the Great Māhele, which was the land division that happened in the 1850s under King Kamehameha III. It split the land into three different sections in an effort to prevent Western land grabs from taking the land. But it ended up going the opposite direction and it almost made it easier for Westerners, when they overthrew the Queen in 1893 to actually end up seizing the crown lands.

And what they ended up doing is with the stroke of a pen, they just said the crown lands and the government lands are the same thing. And then ever since then from territory status to statehood, the crown lands just got lumped in with government lands. When in fact it [*the crown lands*] was something set aside specifically for the monarch, the ruling monarch and to be kept in trust for the benefit of the Hawaiian people. So those, those particular lands have that extra layer of complexity to it. And again, there's all these different legal frameworks and violations on international scales, that really complicate the situation here in Hawai'i. So I think hopefully that addresses your question.

Randy:

Excellent clarification.

Carolyn: Now to switch gears a little bit. What elements of traditional Hawaiian culture do you most value and incorporate into your life, have a sense that you've worked to make those connections?

Bret: Yes, so I think as I said, I'm very much still a student of Hawaiian culture and, coming back to the whole idea and living with my family. So I live in the Panaewa Homesteads, which is part of the Division of Hawaiian Homelands,

with my uncle's family. And so it's a very different environment than where I grew up, and it's been really helpful in reconnecting to my culture.

But I would say that where I am the most connected is through a connection to place. And that's something that's really important here in Hawai'i. We have this deep, deep connection to this place and this deep connection to our native species. And so, I always feel like, I don't know a whole lot about the language and a lot of the cultural practices, but I do know a lot about our connection and uses for native species. And like, I think that that awareness kind of helps me connect with that. And also just being aware of the history of some of our bird catching and other practices, like *kia manu* [*professional bird catchers*], and other practices like that, that in large part are no longer practiced today.

Because similarly with Hawaiians, because we don't have a sovereignty status and something in that regard - we're technically not exempt from, from being able to use bird feathers and things like that in traditional practice today. So like, if we were to find like a dead 'i'iwi or something, like we wouldn't technically be able to use it by law. And so there's a lot of things like that, that kind of continue to restrict us. But I think like, just being aware of how we use these things. And for me as a biologist, my ultimate goal isn't conservation, is that rather than just conserving these birds for conservation sake, which is still a good and noble practice, I think we need to conserve them to the point where we can restore the cultural practices that they supported.

So I think that's kind of where I feel that I can contribute to Hawaiian culture is by keeping these practices alive, as best as I can, as best as I know. And then also keeping these species alive and hopefully aiding in their restoration so that the practices that they once supported can again come back. So I think that's kind of my connection and my contribution, or where I feel I can make a contribution to my culture and keeping these practices alive.

Randy: I love your explanation of how you're incorporating your - quote - "professional work" into your cultural awakening and how the birds and the feathers being part of that culture is a really, really deep connection.

Here in the United States, as you know but probably many of the listeners don't, for a long, long time, it was illegal for Native Americans to put feathers on their regalia. But there was a loophole of non-enforcement; it wasn't really allowed, it just wasn't prosecuted. And then a decade or two ago the U. S. government finally corrected it so that Native Americans could indeed use feathers of migratory birds. We don't kill them, but we find them by the road as I have with owls and we cherish the feathers.

So has your understanding of being Hawaiian changed rapidly, slowly? Was there an explosive moment where all of a sudden you felt, I've been transformed?

Bret: I think for me, it's just kind of been - it's more of a gradual process. Like I said, even growing up, we always had at least a little bit of connection to here, like we would come and like visit my grandparents and things like that. And, still maintain that connection in a way.

I think though, like one of the biggest things for me was again, kind of in high school, I remember like my middle name, Nainoa, was kind of something that set me apart as different. And especially where I grew up, it was pretty much - I think it was around 90% - white and most of the population was Mormon, and so if you were different from those two things, you definitely stood out.

As I remember, I used to just dread whenever we'd have a substitute teacher, cause they'd always say my name wrong and then all the other kids would bring it up that next day, and so I just dreaded it. But kind of in high school, around the same time, when I became like, I knew that I'm going to work with Hawaiian birds and I'm going to do whatever I can to get to that point, was right when I was like, I need to be proud of my middle name; I need to be proud of my heritage. And I just remember adding it - this is kind of superficial, but adding it to my Facebook profile, like for the longest time it was just Bret Mossman, but I just like, I wanted that to be there and public so people could see it, and I thought it was important for me to continue to use that name. A lot of my friends actually ended up, started calling me Nainoa

and I really enjoyed it. It was just kind of a way to kind of reconnect in that way.

So I think that was kind of like a big one that, that was like the biggest, big, first step for me. And since then, it's just kind of been a gradual - just reading up on as much as I can speaking with our kūpuna [*elders*] over here and getting information about the stories and things here that they still have. And then just consulting a lot of the literature as well. Cause there's, I think, a big problem with bird conservation and bird work in general is a lot of times people don't go back to the indigenous observations of species.

One really big problem with that that was recently highlighted was when the American Ornithological Society has this naming committee. It's an - I think it's the national, what is it? authority. And like, I can't remember - it's NACC, the abbreviation, but they're the ones who decide what the standard English name is in the United States. And so for many Hawaiian species, their only English name is a Hawaiian name. So like a kohekohe, 'i'iwi, 'ōma'ō, you know, they all have those names, but one in particular, the kiwikiu, was previously the Maui parrotbill, did not have that name. And like just some of the comments and things that were said against that [*Hawaiian*] name, which was kind of like a new, a reawakening of language and naming practice, and just really dismissive and disrespectful to Hawaiian culture and Hawaiian practice. And, it really just kind of for me, being in this profession, it was really kind of a slap in the face to be awakened to - like these problems are still here and people are still not paying attention to a lot of the indigenous knowledge because, like kiwikiu, it is just a name, but it still has a lot of information to it.

And in Hawaiian culture, a name is so much more than just that. It has a lot of meaning and reason behind it, you know? And, and so when it's just, just dismiss, that is - really in my eyes, it's poor science because you're just dismissing observation and data; you know, that's information about the bird, you can't just play it off.

I think that's kind of where I've come a little bit, that has helped me kind of push more into fighting for these things and making sure that this information

is included in these species accounts and in this general information. So that the Hawaiian voices and the Hawaiian knowledge that went into studying these species for hundreds of years before the first Westerners arrived, is included because it is information and we need to incorporate that and use it in order to protect these birds.

Randy: You're echoing the sentiments of biologists here in the so-called mainland, who also lament the loss of information and knowledge when names are stripped away and English names or Latin names are assigned to plants. And you explained it again, beautifully.

So after the break, what I want to do is return and explore something that I know is dear to you, which is how the issue of land use and conservation struggles in Hawaii are playing out in specific cases where the future and survival of some bird species are at stake. We'll talk a little bit about the petition that you're working on, and we'll do that in a few minutes. Thanks.

Segment 2

Carolyn: Welcome back. We're visiting today with Bret Nainoa Mossman. And in this segment, he's going to be talking about his work on behalf of an endangered bird species, the kiwikiu, in Hawai'i. So Bret, if you could briefly summarize your Change.org petition: its goals and what impelled you to take up this cause.

Bret Nainoa Mossman: So, the kiwikiu is probably one of the, if not the, most threatened birds on the planet right now with extinction. Hawai'i is the bird extinction capital of the world; we've had over 77 species go extinct in the last few hundred years, and that pales in comparison to any other land area. The biggest issue is that we're fighting all these different problems. And so what what's happened is in recent times, the kiwikiu has plummeted. In 2017, a survey was done and their estimated population was at about 157 birds. And they're estimated to be extinct in as soon as 2026. And it's likely sooner than

that, given current trajectories, but that's just what the models are predicting right now.

In response to this, some very well-intentioned and very passionate and capable biologists have come up with a solution where they're trying to transfer the birds from the wild in Maui. They want to transfer 30 birds to three different breeding facilities in the U.S. continent, one in West Virginia, one in Pennsylvania, and one in Utah. This to me just seems like a very extreme action, and it really does not address a really big issue that we've had here in Hawai'i in the past, and with captive breeding programs in particular: our birds are just really, really specialized. And so anytime that we've brought them into captivity and tried to rear them and then release them, it hasn't gone well. And in fact, most of the birds within a short time after being released have died, including kiwikiu in 2019.

And so I think that the thing that I have such alarm with is that they're taking this action to move these birds to captive breeding facilities on the mainland, when even captive breeding facilities here in Hawai'i have not been able to successfully raise these birds, even though they've been doing it for 40 years. And so instead of going with the programs, or instead of trying something new and something else, they're sending these birds to another program and starting back at square one, which to me is very, very concerning.

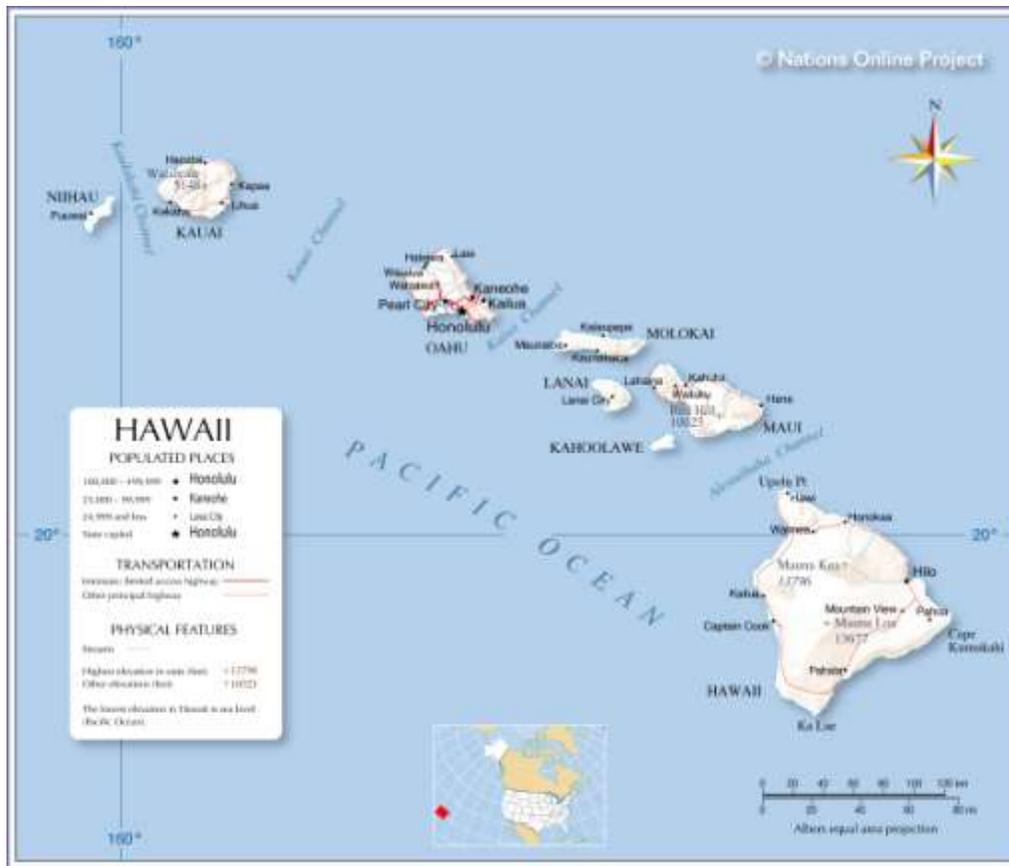
Furthermore, as a Hawaiian who spent time - most of my life - on the mainland, it really highlights a problem for me because even here in Hawai'i, when we brought these birds into captivity, they lose really key elements of their culture - from behavior and songs, to even predator avoidance. And these are all things that they would have been taught by their parents in the wild, but we haven't been able to replicate that in captivity. And so by doing that, by taking them even further away from their native environments and completely removing them from the islands, and removing them from contact with native plants, I think you're just going to make that even worse. And so that's why I'm really trying to encourage the folks making these decisions to choose a different course of action.

Randy: What is there about scientists that gives them this notion that they can uproot plants and animals and indigenous people and transplant them into the city, or a rewilding fenced-in nature park, and that they're going to thrive, when the evidence continually is that it doesn't work. Is there something else going on here?

Bret: I think it's just that they view captivity as this strong safety net, because the bird is still alive, right? Like if you bring it into captivity, it's still alive. But I think what's not being considered is the importance of the birds' behaviors, the importance of the birds' cultures. Time and time again, what they're finding across the world, whether it be in Australia, New Zealand or here in Hawai'i, when birds go into captivity, they lose some of these key elements, and then trying to get them back in the wild becomes that much more difficult. The solution that I have come up with is not perfect because it still requires moving these birds, because what the problem is here in Hawai'i is that we have these diseases that are really, really rampant, particularly avian malaria, which is spread by mosquitoes.

And mosquitoes are non-native. They were introduced in the 1820s, and since then, they have just caused the massive wave of extinction that we've seen here. But fortunately on Hawai'i Island, there are certain forested areas that do not seem to be having the same mosquito issues. And in fact, Hakalu Forest National Wildlife Refuge is one of the only places in all of the islands that has stable or increasing populations of endangered forest birds, whereas everywhere else across the chain, birds are declining.

The solution that I'm proposing that the working group pursue instead, is to translocate. Rather than taking the birds into captivity and sending them to the mainland, they should translocate them to Hawai'i Island. And while it is still removing them from their native place, I know a lot of native Hawaiians who have moved from Maui to Hawai'i Island and they have thrived, you know. And I think, whereas if you move Hawaiians from here to the continent, they don't do quite as well.



Map source credit: https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/USA/hawaii_map.htm

And I think you're going to see the same kind of situation with the native birds. And in fact, we have seen very similar situations with the birds in Papahānaumokuākea, the Northwestern Hawaiian islands. There they've done several translocations moving birds to different islands. And every time they've done that the birds have thrived like, most recently the ulūlu, or the Nihoa millerbird, was moved from Nihoa to Laysan, and their populations are up by well over a hundred percent since that move happened. And so they're well on their way to recovery. I think that it just hasn't happened here in the main islands for some concerns, like some folks think that they might compete with other birds, but there's just not very strong evidence for that. When we do have very strong evidence that captivity has negative effects on the birds.

Carolyn: Between the idea of “transplant the birds to another continent and ecosystem in order to save them”, and then there's the classic Indian residential boarding school mantra of “kill the Indian to save the man”, you

know: take the kids at a young age away from their families, move them to a new place, put them in the schools, cut their hair, eradicate their language. And of course now we're seeing the harm that was done by that; that's been a generational issue that people now are working on. So have you seen any signs of the birds that have been relocated ever moving back or is it - because of the ecosystem changes, is it a one-way relocation?

Bret: It does depend on the species. So some have moved back, like particularly palila on Mauna Kea. They did try to translocate birds from the southwest slope, where they are found primarily, to the northern slope and some stayed, but the vast majority of them ended up returning. But for the other translocations for forest birds, particularly in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, because the distance is so far, they haven't been able to return back to the islands where they originated from.

And similarly with the translocations that have happened here, historically, most notably by Queen Liliuokalani: she translocated Hawaiian 'ō'ō to Kaua'i and created a small population there, before Western land management practices became restrictive and limited what we could do, to try to protect the birds. In general, sometimes the birds will try to return, especially if it's on the same island, but if it's a new island, generally they've stayed. With kiwīkiu in particular, they did translocate them in 2019. And unfortunately it wasn't successful, but the birds did end up sticking in that location.

Randy: We'll pick up this conversation after the break; the parallels to what has happened to indigenous people are truly remarkable.

Carolyn: Thank you.

Segment 3

Randy: Welcome back. We're with our guest, Bret Mossman, again, and I have a question to begin this segment, which is: for me as an indigenous person, the story of both indigenous people and endangered birds on Hawaii echoes the history of my Native American ancestors. Our population was reduced by 90%, by the impact of colonization, our languages eroded and nearly

forgotten. We were relocated to unfamiliar habitats. If we look at the dislocations and relocations of all of the indigenous ones, both human and other than humans, what might we learn from looking at one and applying the lessons to the other?

Bret: I think for me, what I've seen is in either case there's just this tremendous loss. From the very beginning, with diseases as in with native peoples and the birds - you just see this huge drop-off and decline in these birds. And so like recently on Kaua'i where they have some endangered bird species, they found that their song repertoire is becoming really restricted. So basically they're all starting to sound the same. And so they're losing, they're losing their language as they're declining. And that's the same kind of thing that happened here in Hawaii, the same thing that's happened to indigenous peoples. It's like, as you lose your kūpuna, all your elders, you lose that information that has been passed down forever. And I think that's something that is really, really hard.

And then if you take that another step, for instance, with the residential schools, or by removing these birds from the wild and putting them in captivity, you're separating them, not only from their kūpuna, in the form of their parents, like in the bird and the birds that they're around, but you're also separating them from their kūpuna in the form of their forest, like in Hawaiian and Hawaiian creation.

And in Hawaiian thinking, there's this - if things that come before you are your kūpuna, in the Kumulipo, the Hawaiian creation chant, one of the last things *[created]* is people. And so everything else above us are our kūpuna, and it is our kuleana or responsibility to take care of those things. I think when you break that connection, you forget about that. And then you stop taking care of these natural ecosystems and these natural places, which are the foundation of our culture. And I think you get a very similar thing with people and with birds.

Randy: Beautiful answer. And again, it just echoes what indigenous people all over the face of the earth are trying to assert.

Carolyn: So I wanted to ask, can you give any other specific examples of ways that indigenous spirituality and concepts of the world help you to understand the birds?

Bret: Yeah, I think - so in Western view, we're taught to not personalize animals, you know, we're taught to not give them a human identity. But in Hawaiian thought, birds, they are manu, people - they are bird people, like they are at the same level as us, if not a higher level than us. And I think because I have that teaching and that grounding, I can approach these birds at a different level. And they're responsibility and they're my equal rather than something that is lesser than me, that I am caring for, you know? And I think coming at it at that perspective, really adds importance in preserving them because it's - they're not just birds, they're bird people, they're family. And I think that's a really important element that is often missing from Western land management.

Randy: How does that particular perspective go down with some of your colleagues, mentors, thesis advisors? Is it alien to them? Are they tolerant but condescending, or are they hostile, or all of the above?

Bret: Unfortunately, I think it's a little bit of all of the above. I think it's mostly like the tolerant, but condescending or in some cases it's kind of like on the surface, they accept it, but when you try to call them on it, it becomes an issue, you know? And so I think they try to - a big pattern. And again, this is definitely not everybody.

And in here in Hawai'i, I would say that things are a lot better than at least where I came from in Utah. But there's still definitely this surface level of being indigenous where that if you scrape it away, it's still just hiding all of the deeply rooted problems that continue to plague our society.

Randy: I have had numerous conversations with people who are social scientists or so-called hard scientists, and when I tell them the stories of my own awakening of intimate encounters with an owl or a Coy-Wolf, they will say, Oh - and they will usually half whisper it - they'll say, "I've had the same

experience. But if I ever wrote about that in my profession, I'd be ostracized from the profession." And then those [people] very often volunteer that they wish they had more such experiences, but they really can't risk going there. It's too much of a tension.

So I have a question that goes to a beautiful little moment in one of your video clips, and I hope I'm not putting you on the spot. When you were looking at the radar blips, you somewhat humorously said that another person had suggested that some of the radar blips were bird spirits. And that just grabbed me, you know. I stopped and I listened very carefully. Is that something you can say in passing, you know, with a bit of a humorous chuckle, or is that a taboo, to say it in a serious scientific voice? If I'm not putting you on the spot?!

Bret: No, no, I think it's - definitely, I think, in a serious scientific voice, it definitely wouldn't be taken very seriously. I think with the people that I worked with on that project in particular, it was definitely like this could be a possibility, you know, because we actually never figured out exactly what all those things were on the radar.

And I mean, we were surveying on Mauna Kea, so that's the peak, that's the entrance into the realm above, you know? And so it could be something like that, and I think being open to those possibilities, I think is important and not just laughing them off is also. And so that's where I was, I was pretty grateful with who I was working with on that project, that it wasn't something that was just laughed off. It was like, you know, that might actually be it, especially given our history and how many birds have disappeared from this place.

Just for 'i'iwi, for instance, they think there was as many as 17 million of them when Cook first arrived, whereas today there's probably around 300,000 and they're continuing to decline. But new technology is right around the horizon that can potentially save them. So hopefully, hopefully we'll get there.

Randy: That's a wonderful, upbeat message to end this segment. And in the final segment, I want to return to the Earth Day theme because we really want

to talk about ways of healing the planet. And you just alluded to that message. So we'll take a break and be right back.

Segment 4

Carolyn: Welcome back. We're talking with Bret Nainoa Mossman and he's talking about his work in Hawaii and specifically he needs to explain some more about his current effort on behalf of the kiwikiu. So Bret, if you could mention what you and your fellow supporters of the birds are doing for action on this issue.

Bret: Mahalo, Carolyn. And so I think the biggest thing that I want to draw attention to is that while I am opposed to the action that is being proposed, I think it's really important that the organizations that are doing the conservation for this species are still getting support.

So I just kind of want to end on the kiwikiu, and highlight that the way forward is that we need three people in particular to sign exemptions in order for a translocation to occur. That's the Governor of Hawaii David Ige, Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland, and the Regional Director of the Pacific Region from the United States Fish and Wildlife service. So hopefully if those three people can take action, we can really move forward with translocating birds to Hawai'i Island to give them that shot.

I think in order to do that, the four organizations that I'm really hoping to bring awareness for and to assist is the American Bird Conservancy Hawai'i, who is working on a Birds Not Mosquitoes project

<https://abcbirds.org/program/hawaii/>

And then there's the Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project

<https://mauiforestbirds.org/> who do most of the on the ground field management for the Kiwikiu and other Maui forest birds.

And then there's the Nature Conservancy's Waikamo'i Preserve, which is one of the strongholds remaining for the Kiwikiu population.

<https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/waikamoi/>

And then finally, there's the Maui Bird Conservation Center and the Keauhou Bird Conservation Center, our local captive breeding facilities, which would be really important for keeping the birds temporarily to quarantine them, to make sure they don't have any diseases that they might spread to Hawai'i Island, if they were to be moved. *[Hawai'i Endangered Bird Conservation Program supports both of these centers.]*

<http://www.conservationconnections.org/program/hawaii-endangered-bird-conservation-program>

Randy: We'll put links to those organizations on our website and in the transcripts for these programs. So that listeners who want to be supportive can take an activist role.

Bret: Excellent. Yeah, that would be super beneficial. And I'm actually running - we'll be running - starting in May a fundraiser and giveaway for these four organizations, just to help boost the cause. The fact of the matter is, unless we really boost the funding and community input into the kiwikiu, we're not going to save them.

And I think that really touches, too, on kind of science activism. Like oftentimes scientists are asked not to participate in activism, but I think that in today's world, we're the ones that are most intimately connected to these birds, and to these places. And in order to get people to care about them, we really need to step into those activist shoes, and advocate for these species.

With kiwikiu in particular - with Hawaiian birds in particular - Western scientists have been trying for a hundred years to save species and by themselves, they haven't been able to do it. And I think if anything, what this petition has shown is that the community cares about this and the community will come together to work to save this bird. Like that's the only option forward, frankly, because we can't do it by ourselves. We need the community to step in and step up and we need to work to preserve these species that

came before us.

Randy: I think also you embody what a U.N. report recently concluded, which is that an indigenous perspective complements the scientific perspective, and throughout the world, endangered habitat and endangered species benefit when indigenous people are involved. And when the indigenous person, like you, happens to be a scientist, I think it's a great combination.

So since it is Earth Day, and we're coming toward the end of the program, I want to return to the question of what can we be learning from the birds that is relevant to reconnecting in an intimate way to nature and to healing the planet? What if you could - as you know, Dr. Seuss said for the trees, who speaks for the trees is the Lorax. If you could speak for the birds, what would the message be to all of us on Earth Day?

Bret: You know, I think for Hawaiian birds in particular, there's this element of harmony between the species. Like you never see - I've spent hundreds of hours in the forest with these birds and you just, you hardly ever see these aggressive interactions that you would see in other places. And even birds that you think would compete, end up being in really close association. And even recently there was, at Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge, there was a female 'akiapōlā'au that ended up adopting a juvenile 'alawī. So it's an entirely different species, and she fed and took care of that bird for months. And so I think that's where we can really learn from the birds is like, even when things are different from us or they behave differently, we can all still work together in the same place and make it work and survive collectively and together. I think that's the biggest thing.

For a long, long time, Western science has tried to keep people and nature separate, but that's just not the answer. Like we, in order to come together and preserve this place and preserve our ecosystems, we have to be one - hand in hand working with our birds, working with indigenous peoples, working with Western scientists. We have to bring it all together in one community and go forward rather than continuing to bicker between ourselves and not coming to an actual solution. So I think that's kind of what I

have learned from the birds. And that's what I think people in general need to do going forward.

Randy: It's a beautiful and inspiring answer. I thank you – migwetch, as we say in Potawatomi. One other sort of variation on the question: there's a great deal of talk now about living in the Anthropocene and the dominance of humans and impending extinctions, which some people feel are inevitable and unavoidable. You seem to be a bit of an optimist. So on Earth Day, what are the reasons for us to be optimistic and to act in an optimistic manner?

Bret Nainoa Mossman:

I think for me here in Hawai'i, like I said, there's been this long history of loss, but more so now than ever. I just see this really grassroots movement in the community to care about these things and to really take action on these things. And the other thing that is really exciting for me too, is that there's these new technologies that are finally opening up the possibility of doing landscape level mosquito control here in Hawai'i. And if we can do that - that is just - that will be the silver bullet for saving Hawaiian bird species. If we can eliminate mosquitoes from this place, it'll just be a night and day difference for our birds.

I think that's still a ways away, but it's predicted to be possible by as soon as 2024. And that's where the American Bird Conservancy "Birds, Not Mosquitoes" program brings me so much excitement and so much joy. Because finally for the first time, we have a really strong method to fight to save these birds. For the first time since 1826, we have tools in the toolbox to fight against mosquitoes and bring our birds back from the brink of extinction.

Randy: Bret, thanks so much. You've been a great guest. You've been inspiring and you give us hope on this Earth Day. We have to wrap it up now. I hope we can touch base with you again and find out how your petition and your work is going.

So to our viewers, I want to say to you also migwetch, thank you for listening. I hope that this broadcast has given you time and space to reconnect with

your roots in Mother Earth and with your ancestral roots. Before your busy day distracts you from this moment, I encourage you to take a few minutes to reach out and feel the presence of living flora and fauna, and perhaps even that of ancestors. Allow yourself to touch their presence, capture that moment and hold onto it.

And if you might, write to me and let me know about your experience. I can be reached at randykritkausky@hushmail.com, or through my website, randykritkausky.com, where you can also find transcripts of “Indigenous Perspectives” radio programs. And that allows you to read as well as to listen. Thank you very much.

Carolyn: Thank you, Bret.

For audio (57 minutes total)

<http://www.ecologia.org/news/6.EarthDayHawaiianBirdsApr2021.mp3>

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