



Offshore Islet Restoration Committee

*Hawaii's offshore islets are our biological gems,
providing safe havens for native species
that once flourished throughout the state.
These islets harbor hope for the future of coastal biodiversity.*

The Offshore Islet Restoration Committee: Who We Are

Hawaii's offshore islets are the last refuge for many of our rare coastal species and have potential for becoming a safe haven for many more. In September 2002, the Offshore Islet Restoration Committee (OIRC) was formed by a small group of dedicated professionals who recognized the need to protect and restore these biological gems. Our goal is to insure that Hawaii's offshore islets are free of harmful alien species and are supporting healthy, native seabird, plant, insect and marine communities. OIRC members work together to plan and carry out this goal.

The OIRC is comprised of representatives from the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources' Divisions of Forestry and Wildlife and Aquatic Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife 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, NOAA Fisheries, Pele'a Polynesia, the National Tropical Botanical Garden, and the University of Hawaii.

Hawaii's Biological Gems

Hawaii is revered for its natural beauty and attracts visitors from around the world. What many visitors and residents do not realize is that most of the places they see have been greatly altered and degraded since the time man first arrived in the Hawaiian archipelago. For example, over 470 Hawaiian species (24% of the total number in the U.S.) are classified as threatened, endangered or candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

The greatest threat to Hawaii's native species is the invasion of aggressive alien species such as rats, cats, mongoose, weeds and fire ants. Inappropriate human uses and development also threaten native ecosystems.

Because many of our offshore islets are isolated from these harmful influences, they still shelter coastal species that are no longer present on the main islands.



*Photo by Maya LeGrande
Offshore islets are a refuge for native species
like these rare loulu palms.*

For example, large and healthy seabird colonies are only found today on offshore islets protected from introduced predators and coastal development. Because of their isolation, these offshore biological gems hold great potential for restoration of native coastal habitats and are relatively inexpensive to manage.

OIRC Conservation Objectives

Conduct Biological Surveys

As a first step in planning islet conservation, statewide biological surveys of birds, plants, insects, and marine species are needed for many islets, some of which have not been visited in over 20 years. The goal is to produce comprehensive species lists for each islet.

During the surveys, genetic material from rare plant species will be collected and conserved in the hope of eventually increasing population numbers and distribution.



Photo by Ken Wood

Lehua island, off the coast of Niihau, is home to one of the largest Red-footed booby breeding colonies in Hawaii.

Assess and Prioritize Islets for Restoration

Once biological surveys are complete, the OIRC will assess the data collected and prioritize islets for biological restoration. Selections will be based upon criteria such as the biological value of the islet, whether restoration would benefit the islet, and the technical feasibility of doing restoration.

Restore High Priority Islets

The small size of islets makes it practical to carry out restoration actions that would be difficult or impossible in larger areas. Because they are isolated and often difficult to access, restored islets have a good chance of remaining relatively safe from re-invasion by alien species and the other problems present on the larger Hawaiian Islands.

Restoration actions will include eradication and/or control of invasive alien species, controlling soil erosion through re-vegetation and other means, re-introducing rare coastal species, and preventing destructive human uses.

Monitor and Document Restoration Projects

Monitoring is an important facet of islet restoration. Scientific monitoring allows OIRC to document successes and failures and to refine restoration and management techniques. Results will be published and presented at conservation conferences.

Conduct Education and Outreach

Hawaii's offshore islets are living classrooms, providing locals and visitors an opportunity to view and experience some of the last, natural coastal communities left in the state. Our educational goals are to create an awareness and appreciation of the native communities on Hawaii's offshore islets, show the effects that invasive species have upon native communities, and create support for statewide conservation and restoration efforts. We hope that through education, our children will learn and practice behaviors that conserve the islets' native beauty.



Photo by Craig Rowland

Offshore islets and their surrounding waters provide valuable habitat and food sources for a variety of animals such as the Hawaiian monk seal.

For More Information

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