

Trip to Hawaii 2021

Note: If you want to understand the arcana of rules for what birds can go on your ABA list, see <https://www.aba.org/aba-recording-rules-and-interpretations/>. Most readers will want to skip this. Linda and I go by advice we received from more experienced birders in 1985(!), “It’s your list.”

We were engaged in our pandemic substitute for actual birding, watching webinars about birding tours that weren’t being offered in 2021. [Alvaro Jaramillo](#), a tour leader who hails from Chile but now lives in the Bay Area was regaling us with the prospects for a trip around the [Farallon Islands](#), which are a short distance offshore from Point Reyes. Alvaro tossed out an aside, “By the way, I have two openings left on our tour of Hawaii in April if you are interested.”

Linda jumped on it. “We haven’t been to Hawaii since the kids were little.” That was in 1978. I had to look it up. Over the next hour of *discussion*, she prevailed and we signed up. After all, we had gotten vaxxed, the pandemic was practically over, why not celebrate a little.

So, after clearing our schedule, getting COVID tested, at our expense, we hopped on a short flight from San Francisco to Oahu. A short ride on a regular old taxi took us to our hotel in time to do some birding in the park across the street. There, we saw an actual lifer, albeit one far from its native habitat: Java Sparrow.



Java Sparrow

We also had wonderful looks at a bird that was not a lifer, but was an addition to our “ABA list.” This Pacific Golden Plover in full breeding plumage was common in the park. We first saw one in Australia, 1976, and later at many locations



Pacific Golden Plover

around the Pacific Rim. It occurs regularly, but rarely on the West Coast, and we could see one in California if we were sufficiently motivated. We aren’t.

We discovered that Alvaro was not personally leading the trip. [Mandy Talpas](#), an excellent guide was our leader. She even had similar tastes in music to Jim. They had a discussion while driving about Billy Joel’s best song. She preferred [Uptown Girl](#), while Jim preferred [Light as the Breeze](#). The latter is a [Leonard Cohen song](#) covered by BJ. There is quite a discussion about the meaning of the lyrics.

We soon discovered that most of the participants on the tour were there to pad their list of birds seen within the ABA Area. That area previously consisted of North America north of Mexico, but not Hawaii. Now, Hawaii has been included, opening up many opportunities for list padding to those interested. That meant mostly those nearing some even 100 count. We had to run a quick report. Jim discovered that he was near 700 on that list, nowhere near the level of true believer, but respectable.



Two Nene geese

We were more interested in seeing the Hawaiian endemics, birds that can be found only on the Islands. Most of these were skittish and very difficult to photograph, so that we have only to that we managed to capture for our album.

These two Nene Geese on a golf course on Kauai were cooperative. When we visited Hawaii in 1978, they were only found in captivity, and therefore not countable by ABA rules.

Another endemic species that we managed to photograph was the Hawaiian Hawk, a small buteo that we saw years ago. He sat at the top of a tree for a long time, but always had branches to block some of the view. This is what we call a “record shot.”



Hawaiian Hawk at top of a tree.

The Hawaiian Stilt is considered a subspecies of the Black-necked Stilt that we have on the mainland. Birders worry about subspecies these days because so many of them are being elevated to full species, something called an “armchair lifer.”

We found this one fun to watch as it jostled with a Zebra Dove for the right to pick food off the roadway.

After a couple of days on Oahu, we flew to Kauai. This involved another COVID test. Our leader had cleverly arranged for us to get the test as the last minute so that we would be covered when we flew from Kauai to the Big Island within the 72 hour limit.

Kauai has zillions of feral chickens running around everywhere. They also allegedly have some of the ancestors of our chicken, Red Jungle Fowl. The jungle fowl were brought to the island by the Polynesians; the chickens, by Europeans.



Hawaiian Stilt and Zebra Dove

Since both of these are *Gallus gallus*, telling them apart requires careful observation. The ones with dark legs are supposed to be descended from the originals brought by the Polynesians. Try your hand on this one.



Red Jungle Fowl or Chicken

On Kauai, we *chased* a truly rare bird for Hawaii, an Inca Tern. We had fabulous views of some of these birds in Chile in 2017. We think it may well be the most beautiful tern in the world. This one, an immature flew by to let us tick it in the ABA area after racing from the airport to the South End of the island before it was too dark to see it. We seldom do this. It was too dark for a picture.

Then, we moved on to the Big Island, where we did manage to see some of the endemic species found there. Linda loved this photo of a Gold Dust Day Gecko in a shopping center where we got breakfast.

We have since learned that despite its beauty, it is considered an invasive pest. Sigh!



Gold Dust Day Gecko

[An album of the trip](#) is online with several more photos.