

## SAFFRON FINCH

*Sicalis flaveola*

**naturalized (non-native) resident, recently established**

*S.f. flaveola*

Saffron Finches are native to S America and have been successfully introduced to Panama, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and on O'ahu and Hawai'i I in the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands* (Long 1981, Lever 1987, Ridgely and Tudor 1989, AOU 1998). Populations on both islands have been established since introduction in the mid 1960s, whereas additional observations on Kaua'i, Maui, and Lana'i in the 1990s-2010s appear to be from local releases rather than natural dispersal from other islands, and we consider these as yet-to-be established populations in 2016.

On *O'ahu*, Saffron Finches were first reported from the w. slopes of Diamond Head in the fall of 1965 (*E* 26:54). Throughout 1966 a pair was observed in Kapiolani Park (*E* 26:90, 26:111, 27: 64), and numbers in this vicinity increased during the 1970s, peaking at 22 individuals on the Honolulu [Christmas Bird Count](#) 17 Dec 1972 (*E* 33:79). They also showed up at Bellows Field in Dec 1972 (*E* 33:79), then at Manoa Valley up to Lyon Arboretum in 1975-1976 (e.g., *E* 36:155, 37:47), and spreading toward Pearl Harbor in Jan 1975, nesting there by 1977 (*E* 35:146, 38:37). However, populations declined in these areas by the early 1980s ([Graph](#)), prompting HAS (1986) to state that they were no longer on the island, although continued sporadic observations (e.g., *E* 47:42, 48:31, 48:114) indicated that they were persisting in small numbers. By the 1990s Saffron Finches were again detected in the Pearl Harbor area, including Pearl City and Kunia, and numbers increased dramatically in these areas through 2014 according to Waipi'o [Christmas Bird Count](#) data ([Graph](#); Ralph 1990; *E* 61:75, 78). In the 1990s, Saffron Finches were also again seen sporadically around Honolulu ([Graph](#)), including Kapiolani Park again, Salt Lake in Moanalua, and Hawaii Kai. During the 2000s they turned up in Waipahu, Mililani, Ewa Beach, and Nanakuli (cf. HAS 2005), and in the early 2010s in Nu'uanu Valley and the N shore around to Haleiwa. Numbers elsewhere also appeared to be elevating, with high counts of 70 at the Waiwa Unit of PHNWR 4 Aug 2012 and 20 at Kaiaka Beach Park 14 Jan 2014.

On *Hawai'i I*, individuals were apparently released along with other finches and waxbills at the Pu'u Wa'a Wa'a Ranch in or before 1965 and they were increasing there by Dec 1967 (*E* 28:107). By 1969-1971 they were considered "abundant" at Pu'u Wa'a Wa'a and were observed at Kamuela (van Riper 1978). Expansion was rapid during the 1970-1980s (Scott et al. 1986): by 1973 they were reported from Mt Hualalai (*E* 34:3), by 1978 they were "well-established" in Kona (*E* 39:20), in 1979 they were first noted at Hapuna Beach (*E* 41:78) and quickly became abundant there, by 1984 they had spread south to Keahou and were increasing, by 1985 they had reached Captain Cook, by 1986 they were observed at Pohakuloa along the Saddle Road, and by 1989 they had shown up in Hilo. It was not considered established on Hawai'i I by Berger (1972) but considered established by Pyle (1977) and Berger (1981). In Kona, numbers continued to increase, with a peak count of 476 on the North Kona [Christmas Count](#) 20 Dec 1992 (*E* 53:48). By the 1990s-mid-2010s they had become established commonly throughout lowlands around the island and including up to Volcano (e.g., 4 recorded there on the 2003 [Christmas Count](#)); it was considered one of the most common species in drier and human-altered habitats. During 2010-2016 over 300 were regularly counted at

Pu'uanahulu Country Club, with high counts there 500 on 10 Oct 2013 and 1,050 on 5 Feb 2016.

On Kaua'i, up to six Saffron Finches were observed in Waimea near a house with exotic birds in cages in Oct 2004 to Mar 2005, with two begging juveniles observed in Mar. By 2004 they were spreading here (e.g., [HRBP 5937-5938](#)) and by 2008 had been observed at Kekaha and in PRMF at the W end of the island. Through the mid-2010s they continued to be observed widely in small numbers on Kaua'i (high count 9 at Barking Sands 15 Dec 2015), apparently on their way to establishment on Kaua'i. On Maui, a pair of Saffron Finches was observed nesting (raising one young) in a back yard at Pukalani in Apr 1997-Mar 1998, and a single individual, observed there in Dec 2001-Feb 2002 (e.g., *E* 62:120), was targeted for removal by DOFAW. We consider these local releases (see [Chestnut Munia](#)) rather than natural dispersals from O'ahu or Hawai'i. Further reports from Maui were from Kula in Feb 2010 and Dec 2012, the Haiku area in May 2014 and Jan 2016, and Kihei in Jan 2015. The only other report from Maui Nui involves one photographed at Hulopoe Beach, Lana'i for multiple days around 7 Jan 2013 ([HRBP 6756](#)). The bird on Lana'i may have flown over from Maui; otherwise, as there is little evidence for natural dispersal of this species between islands (e.g., no records from Moloka'i), we consider observations on Kaua'i and Maui Nui to be based on local releases and that populations are not yet established on these islands.

Four subspecies of Saffron Finch have been recognized (Ridgley and Tudor 1989, Clement et al. 2016) in two subspecies groups (sometime considered separate species). Hawaii populations have been identified as of the *S.f. flaveola* group residing from Ecuador and nw. Peru to e. Colombia, n. Venezuela, and ne. Brazil (AOU 1998). Within this group, specimen examination (PP) and field observation indicate that they are of the nominate subspecies *flaveola* of Colombia-to-Venezuela as opposed to *valida* of Ecuador and Peru or *brasiliensis* from Brazil.

### [Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

### [Literature cited](#)

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