

Hāhā (*Cyanea grimesiana*): Sowing the Seeds of Laughter

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A symphony of soprano trills and song carried by northeasterly winds whorl through the misty, highland forests of Oahu. These mysterious phrases are alien to people and Hawaii alike. Forgotten melodies of the extinct 'Ō'ō historically echoed here, but now are replaced with those of the Japanese white-eye and others. These introduced birds are now the only fruit-eating species to inhabit the emerald-green canopies, which sprouted from seeds that were most likely expelled by birds in days passed. With more than half of Hawaii's plants dependent on birds to eat and disperse their seeds, what does this novel ecosystem mean for future plant populations? My research investigates if non-native birds eat fruit from various critically endangered and extinct-in-the-wild plants. Additionally, I recorded bird song and emitted them via speakers to test if I could entice birds to consume fruit from these rare plant species. One such plant was Hāhā, pictured above, which vividly demonstrates the beauty of Hawaiian flora and what is at stake if we neglect our stewardship of this archipelago. Less than 50 individuals of Hāhā can be found in the wild, yet its fruit was a particular delight for birds during the humid, summer months.