

## EXTINCT BIRDS OF THE WORLD

### #11 Kākāwahie or Moloka‘i Creeper



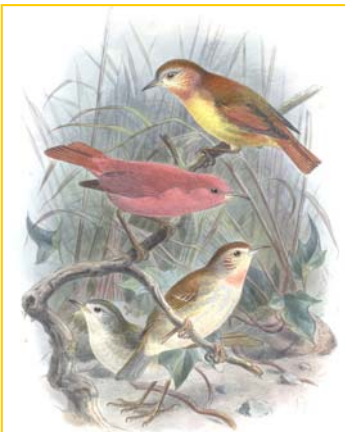
AN ILLUSTRATION  
FROM 1890  
Artist: F.W. Frohawk

The Kākāwahie or Moloka‘i Creeper, *Paroreomyza flammea*, was a species of finch in the Fringillidae family. Formerly occurring on the Hawaiian island of Moloka‘i, it is now extinct. It was 13cm (5½”) in length with markedly clawed toes. This bird received its Latin name *flammea* (flame) as the males were scarlet red all over. The female had more of a brownish tinge to its abdomen. Its call was a “chip chip” rather like someone cutting wood in the distance. They were discovered in the late 19th century when Wilson, a British ornithologist, shot a female and two males. These birds were named *Paroreomyza flammea* because of the resemblance to a ball of fire as it flew from tree to tree in search of food.

They lived in forested areas mainly on the Ohialele Plateau, where it could usually be found before its disappearance in 1963. It used its short blunt beak to extract insects from old Naio trees, *Myoporum sandwicense*. The main portion of its diet was beetle larvae and caterpillars. However, it occasionally sipped nectar from flowers, including those of the Naio. The exterior of its nest was reportedly composed of moss.



NAIO TREE FLOWER



Above: adult male & female.  
Below: juvenile male & female.

Illustration from  
*Avifauna of Laysan*  
By Lionel Walter Rothschild,  
published 1893-1900.  
Artist: John Gerrard Keulemans

The extinction causes of this species were probably similar to those of other Hawaiian forest birds. Habitat destruction, avian disease spread by introduced mosquitoes, and introduced predators, were all likely factors in its demise. Introduced mosquitoes infected with Avian Malaria and Avian Pox caused the Kākāwahie, when bitten, to grow ill and develop lumps, that eventually paralysed the bird, which then died of starvation. Also, these birds were often killed for their red feathers which were used in the capes and leis of the Hawaiian nobles and royalty. It was last sighted in montane rainforest on the Ōhi‘alele Plateau in 1963. However, there are reports of this bird holding on till the 1970s, but after that it has not been seen again, and is almost certainly now extinct.

R.V.C. with help from Wikipedia