

Seabirds 'Iwa or Great Frigatebird

Fregata minor

SPECIES STATUS:

State recognized as indigenous
Moderate Concern – NAWCP
Hawai'i Natural Heritage Ranking G4-Apparently secure

SPECIES INFORMATION:

The Great Frigatebird is a dark seabird with a slim body, a forked tail, a long and hooked bill, and a wingspan of up to 7 feet. Five subspecies are recognized, with the *F. m. palmerstoni* subspecies the only one found in the Hawaiian archipelago. An adept aerial flier, the Great Frigatebird obtains some of its food by robbing other seabirds, through pursuit in flight, inspiring its Hawaiian name, which means "thief." The Great Frigatebird does not need to come to land to roost, but can soar for hours or days. On land, however, the Great Frigatebird has difficulty walking due to its small legs and feet. Characteristic of many tropical seabirds, the Great Frigatebird has a long lifespan and lays only 1 egg. The species nest in colonies containing ten to several thousand pairs, and may nest near or mixed with other species. They are surface feeders, catching flying fish and squid swimming close to the surface.

DISTRIBUTION:

Worldwide, the Great Frigatebird nests in colonies on islands from the Western Atlantic Ocean throughout the Pacific and Southern Indian Oceans. In Hawaii, the Great Frigatebird nests on offshore islets in the Main Hawaiian Islands, including Moku Manu, Lehua and Kaula, and on islands in the NWHI, especially Laysan, Lisianski, and French Frigate Shoals. Its nonbreeding range is poorly known.

ABUNDANCE:

An estimate of the worldwide population 500,000 – 1,000,000 individuals. Approximately 20,000 birds nest in the Hawaiian Archipelago, with the largest colonies on Nihoa (3,500–4,500 pairs) and Laysan (2,000–2,500). Other sites in the NWHI include French Frigate Shoals (350–375 pairs), Necker (700–900 pairs), Lisianski (750–850 pairs), Pearl and Hermes Atoll (300–400 pairs), Kure Atoll (200–250 pairs). Known roosting sites in the Main Hawaiian Islands include Moku Manu (0–1 pairs), Kaula (250–350 pairs), and Lehua (5–10 pairs), but there is no current evidence of nesting in those locations.

LOCATION and CONDITION OF KEY HABITAT:

Terrestrial: Nests and roosts on islands within tradewinds area, mostly on predator-free islands. Great Frigatebirds nest primarily in tops of bushes or trees, including beach naupaka (*Scaevola sericea*), beach heliotrope (*Tournefortia argentea*), pisonia trees (*Pisonia grandis*), and mangrove trees (*Brugiera* spp., *Rhizophora* spp.) **Marine:** pelagic

THREATS:

- Introduced predators (cats, rats);
- Habitat degradation and destruction (human, rabbits)

CONSERVATION ACTIONS:

- Eradication and control of introduced predators at current and potential nesting sites;
- Continued protection and management of existing wildlife sanctuaries and refuges

MONITORING:

RESEARCH PRIORITIES:

- Surveys of colonies to determine current population status

References:

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