

WE ARE OCEAN PEOPLE: INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP IN MARINE CONSERVATION  
CINDY BOYKO & 'AULANI WILHELM, GUEST EDITORS

*Nā Hulu Aloha—A Precious Remembering*



*Hōkū Cody, Umi Kai, Miki'ala Pescaia & Jen Waipa*



*Nā Hulu Aloha—A Precious Remembering*  
Origin stories of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument  
Native Hawaiian Cultural Working Group Kīamanu Sub-committee

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#### FEDERAL PROTECTIONS RECTIFY AN EXPLOITATIVE PAST

The exploitative pursuit of over-harvesting marine megafauna, including seabird feathers, eggs, and guano, to near-extinction led to the earliest US federal protective laws in 1909 by Theodore Roosevelt. Six layers of protection would be established over the 20th century as the story of a successful ecological restoration effort emerged within the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Over that same century, the socioeconomic disparities, especially with regard to the prohibited use of the Hawaiian language, land dispossession, access to education, and a changing political landscape in Hawai‘i, would establish a distance between manukai (seabirds) and Native Hawaiians.

In the 1970s, scientists and management agencies such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) began establishing field camps in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands at Kamole/Laysan and Lalo/Tern Islands. Within the same decade, Kānaka ‘Ōiwi (Native Hawaiians) fiercely fought to protect land and water against further development and destruction, and stood up to the United States military by occupying Kaho‘olawe to end the bombing of the island. This era also launched what is now known as the Hawaiian Renaissance—a time that fostered the revitalization of the Hawaiian language, music, arts, and cultural practices such as wayfinding. As the decade drew to a close, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) was established to improve the overall well-being of the Hawaiian people.

The collective consciousness of Kānaka ‘Ōiwi continued to build throughout the 1980s with the establishment of the Pūnana Leo, a Hawaiian language immersion preschool system, despite operating under a legal ban of the language as the medium of education.

Traditional ceremonies such as the Makahiki, an annual event commemorating the start of the new Hawaiian year, returned in practice to nearly every island community.

Kānaka ‘Ōiwi engagement only continued to increase in the 1990s. Hawaiians understood that for their culture, language, land, and people to thrive, they must take active roles in all aspects of society. A number of Hawaiians began to infiltrate various spaces to develop more Hawaiian culture and ‘āina-based practices within modern contexts. Pono Science, a form of receiving free, prior, and informed consent by Indigenous people, became prevalent in the realms of education and STEM. No longer was it acceptable to engage a community for only their input; rather, participation of Hawaiians in science became a new standard.

At the turn of the 21st century, Kānaka ‘Ōiwi continued their tireless commitment and engagement to the restoration and revitalization of their homeland and their people. After intense collaborations between multiple government agencies and communities, including Native Hawaiians, Papahānumokuākea Marine National Monument (PMNM) was established in the 2000s. Then in 2016, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs was elevated to co-trusteeship of PMNM alongside three other agencies. Today, Kānaka ‘Ōiwi continue to hold space within PMNM by protecting and conserving the precious cultural resources and genealogical relationships they have to these ancestral islands. The stories of this special place continue to be told through cultural practices and perspectives so that modern and future generations will also be rooted in Papahānaumokuākea.

#### FOR BIOCULTURAL EFFORTS

The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, officially known as Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, are home to some of the largest seabird populations in the world, with research and management frameworks

◀ **OVERLEAF** *Lei hulu makahiki packed for transport to the final destination, 2022.* KATHLEEN HO



of commensurate importance. OHA, as co-trustees to that repository, creates an opportunity to support the ongoing conservation efforts, increase community support, and weave these different ways of knowing into current and future climate change adaptations. When considering the collective responsibility to care for such special marine wilderness places, re-examining Traditional Knowledge and the use of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i (the Hawaiian language) must be considered in the observations and understandings as integral to the way forward for Hawai‘i, the Pacific, and the world.

One of the approaches to increasing support is to focus on reconnecting the Native Hawaiian community to Papahānaumokuākea through providing salvaged seabirds to practitioners for ongoing traditional ceremonies such as Makahiki and for featherwork that historically utilized seabirds.

When applying cultural knowledge and values, and acknowledging the important relationship between the Ao realm (main Hawaiian Islands) and Pō realm (Northwestern Hawaiian Islands) of the Hawaiian archipelago, one can see that PMNM provides more structural mana (spiritual connection) and an established reassurance of our connection to Hawai‘i and to the greater expanse of the Pacific.

#### UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORY OF THE KIAMANU AND HAKU HULU

The use of feathers in traditional expressions and practices would not be possible without two important roles—the kiamanu (birdcatchers) and haku hulu (feather worker). Together, their main kuleana (responsibility) was to uphold the status of noble dignitaries such as royals and priests through these feathered expressions. The lei hulu (feathered garland) is one of several stunning examples. In this way, they exist under the wings, if you will, of noble dignitaries as well as of priests/priestesses, while also ensuring that the space held is elevated to a standard fit for spiritual communion.

The haku hulu possessed a type of excellence that can gather, grasp, and bundle ambitious intentions into an exquisite display of spiritual capital, dressing the most noble personages in precious feathered adornments as part of ceremonial and stately affairs.

In pre-contact Hawai‘i, kiamanu, among other occupations, were professionals usually contracted by the ali‘i (traditional nobility) due to their possessing

a complex understanding of the larger phenological patterns; being well-versed in the numerous kapu (restrictions) specific to when, how, and why to gather each bird species; along with the aptitude to outwit the birds they sought to collect. This practice also was steeped in pule (prayers) and intentions of protection and bountifulness. In this way, the kiamanu ensured the replenishment of resources with each taking.

The storied expression of featherwork distinguishes rank and formal ceremonial space in stately functions and ceremonies, as well as symbolizing rank, importance, and class through a variety of ways. The prodigious amount of feathers needed to construct the diversity of items easily gives rise to a highly skilled class of kiamanu. In this way, their role in maintaining the mana (spiritual power) of noble dignitaries set this position apart from the rest. From regalia, cloaks, garlands, standards, and religious articles, most of the historical featherwork heavily depended on the use of forest birds. What is known from historical references was that most seabirds were hunted (lawai‘a manu) as a source of food as well as for feather standards, lei, or tools.

The traditional featherwork practices that have survived into the present did so by adapting. Some adaptations included importing materials (such as ribbon) or using alternative local resources (such as chicken or geese feathers) to make the lei and maintain the rituals of the practice. All of these instances are in response to a changing natural landscape and political climate.

#### REVITALIZING TRADITIONAL PRACTICES AND COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP OF SEABIRDS

Today, there is dwindling seabird nesting habitat due to climate change in Papahānaumokuākea

**PMNM provides more structural mana (spiritual connection) ... to Hawai‘i and to the greater expanse of the Pacific.**



alongside a disdain of federal protections in the main Hawaiian Islands. The Native Hawaiian Cultural Working Group (CWG) of PMNM—an advisory group to PMNM’s Management Board—recognized a need to engage with management agencies in order to revitalize traditional practices and adapted by accepting salvaged birds from federally protected areas through the USFWS Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) Permit process. (“Salvaged birds” under the MBTA are dead birds that have not been intentionally killed and which are made available for a variety of non-personal uses.)

While the CWG’s MBTA permit had been ongoing since 2008, the practitioners involved with initial efforts were established in these work prior to the inception of this permit. In the first years under the permit, most gathering efforts were incidental and intermittent. By 2014, there was a new generation of interest, guided by the vision of older generations, to pursue, at its basic level, an elevated approach to traditional socio-religious practices and responsible environmental kinship inclusive of seabirds.

### THE KIAMANU PROJECT

Under the guidance of the CWG and with the use of their Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) permit (permit-holder: Umi Kai), there has been an intentional pursuit of recognizing multi-agency efforts and operations within PMNM alongside statewide community

▼ Laysan Island field technicians build a drybox for cultural bird collections, August 2017. HOKŪ CODY



collaboration to find a language that could orchestrate a collective effort to generate meaningful interest from the native Hawaiian community in stewardship and caretaking of marine wilderness areas.

The Kiamanu Project, which began in 2014, develops standard gathering and transport methods for salvage-appropriate seabirds within PMNM. The project manages portions of the overall procurement, repository, and distribution, as well as provides educational community workshops that bring together culture and science to create a meaningful experience for all participants. Each request requires a multi-tiered effort to gather, collect, distribute, clean, parse, bundle, and produce.

The practices targeted are lei hulu makahiki, kāhili, kāhili pa’a lima, and kākau uhi (discussed below). The overall premise is guided by cultural values and messages of responsible gathering grounded in reverence and reciprocity.

### Standard protocols for remote field stations

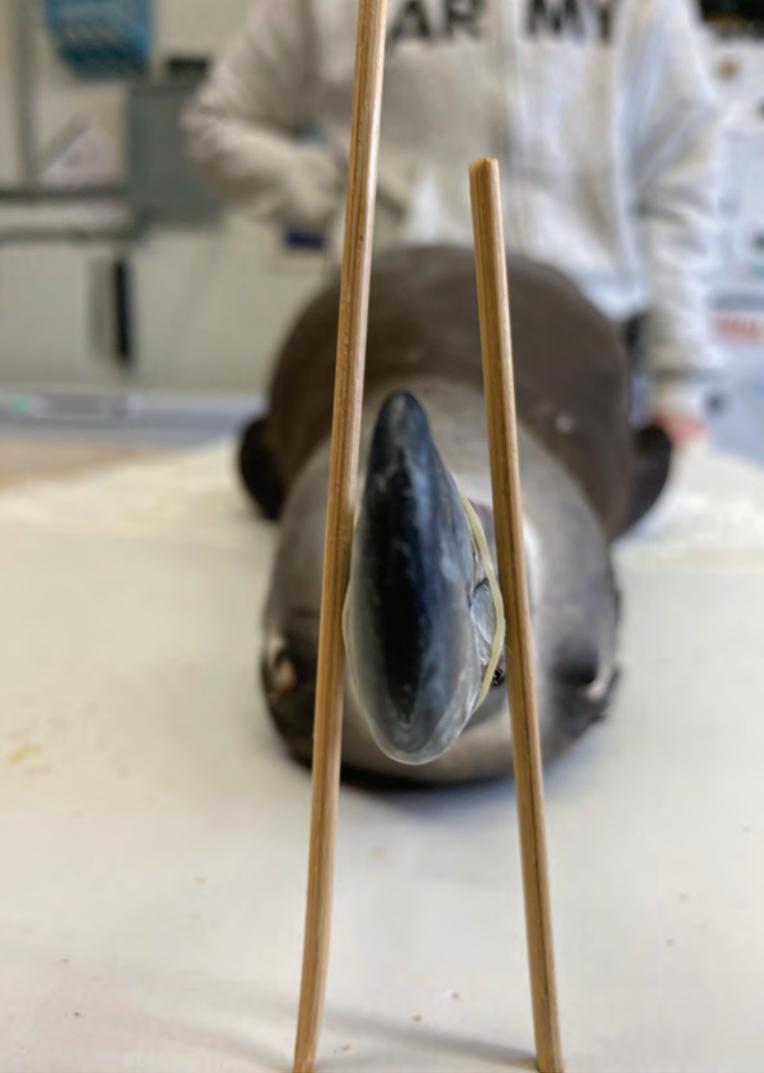
A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) document is an internal management document for PMNM remote field camps. Kure Atoll Conservancy and Hōlanikū/Kure Atoll field camps have been integral to developing guidelines for best management practices in support of this permit. The focus is on translating intangible cultural values into mechanical, tangible actions that correspond to ceremonial standards to be carried out by PMNM biological technicians and PMNM cultural practitioners. The document serves as a central point of conversation for management agencies, field station leaders, scientists, and permit holders.

In 2010, Bishop Museum zoology specimen preparation lab and zoology staff supported the preparation of the first pair of ka’upu used in present-day Makahiki ceremony as taxidermied ka’upu hung on each side of the akualoa (the idol standard). They have continued to aid in training personnel and in the development of formal museum taxidermy standards for clean processing that would contribute to guidelines for the SOP document as well as for the community workshops.

### Community workshops

Community workshops are a safe and meaningful educational space upheld with cultural values to create





▲ Taxidermy processing at Bishop Museum zoology contents lab, September 2020. [HÖKŪ CODY](#)

a traditional product that shares the importance of seabirds within an island landscape alongside the significant role that Papahānaumokuākea holds for the people living in the Main Hawaiian Islands. An added outcome is that these workshops also provide a space to openly discuss cultural values that guide the development of better salvage-gathering methods for the larger gathering effort.

To date, there have been two full workshops hosted in collaboration with community leaders at Kalaupapa National Historical Park as well as at Mokuhulu, Hawai‘i (near Kalapana, Hawai‘i) that aimed to complete traditional products for ceremonial use within those respective communities.

**Cultural products initially supported by the Kiamanu Project**

*Lei hulu makahiki (Makahiki feather leis).* The celestial timing of the rising of the Makali‘i marks the beginning of Makahiki—the wet season in Hawai‘i.



▲▲ Hikili‘i Chow learns to extract iwi uluna from an ‘ā bird at a community workshop held at Kalaupapa National Historical Park, 2018. [MIKIALA PESCAIA](#)  
▲ Kumu Sabra Kauka of Kaua‘i observes Ipolani Ma‘e lashing feather bundles tightly to the lei as more bundles are sorted and prepared. [MIKIALA PESCAIA](#)

A ceremony to open the season commences shortly thereafter, where prescribed offerings are given for the bounties of the year to petition the akua (diety) Lono with gratitude for another successful season of harvesting. Lonoikamakahiki traverses around the island collecting these offerings and, upon completion of the high ceremony, there are games, feasts, and music to celebrate and sharpen our wits and intellect. Throughout the remainder of the season, one would keep ready for the next harvest season by giving space to rest, enjoy, introspect, observe, heal, rebuild, and progress with the growing of the days into the next summer season.

The main bird sourced for this practice was ka‘upu (black-footed albatross). Ka‘upu is the kinolau (physical manifestation) of Lono. The use of ka‘upu in Makahiki is as old as its traditions and there are a





few instances in written text, such as the *Hawaiian Dictionary* by Mary Kawena Pukui, that say the ka'upu are identified as the Laysan albatross. Varying accounts show that the birds used were ka'upu, mōlī, 'ua'u, 'ua'u kani, 'ā, and 'iwa. The important representation was that the lei were made from seabirds.

According to some practitioners of Kā Molokai Makahiki, the use of ka'upu birds symbolized migration, intention, and commitment as well as to summon things to 'upu, or well up, and be bountiful.



With Makahiki ceremonies growing in communities across Hawai'i and the Pacific, most Lonomākua (the name of the idol standard for Makahiki) use feather lei instead of the traditional skinned and hanging ka'upu birds. The traditional standard to dress the akualoa is a set of four feather lei—two black and two white—with one of each color hanging on each side of the cross beam of the standard, next to the kapa that draped on each side. Most ceremonies now utilize alternatives such as chicken, geese, or duck feathers while staying true to the black and white feather lei pairing. The ka'upu or mōlī (Laysan albatross) were utilized interchangeably to complete each request.



The first set of lei were made in 2017 for Kanaloa Kaho'olawe. Since then, there has been a total of 20 lei made across five islands—Kanaloa Kaho'olawe, Molokai, O'ahu, Kaua'i, Hawai'i Island (Ho'okena)—with Kanaloa Kaho'olawe and Molokai having complete sets of four lei. Some lei were made in tandem with others and in those instances shared feathers from the same bird.

▼ Kā Molokai Makahiki award event for post-ceremony Makahiki games hosted for all schools on Moloka'i and select schools across the state at Na'iwa, Moloka'i, January 2018. HŌKŪ CODY





MIKIALA PESCAIA



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At the onset of this effort to create these lei hulu makahiki, there was an intentional pursuit to count feathers and bundles so as to inform the next requests for the same types of products. An exception to this counting was for requests to gather for kähili-making. Similar to leis, kähili-making called for bundling of feathers prior to binding them to a kua lā'au or kumu (a base made of braided natural fibers or native wood). However, according to kähili-makers, 10,000 feathers are needed for a full kähili restoration, which can be equivalent to about 10 birds. There are instances where birds used to make lei hulu makahiki may have also been shared to make kähili pa'a lima (hand-held kähili) from different



▲ Makahiki ceremony at Limahuli, Kaua'i, November 2017. KILIPAKI VAUGHN  
 ◀ Lei hulu makahiki set for Kaho'olawe, October 2017. ERIN PICKETT  
 ▼ The completed pair of lei made from mōli feathers at a community workshop at Kalaupapa National Park, December 2018 KAILE LUGA



Island	White Lei	Black Lei	Types of Birds Used	Years	Total Birds Used
Kaho'lawe	4	6	1st set: mōli Remake: mōli, 'iwa 2nd set: mōli, ka'upu	1st set: 2017 Black remake: 2019 2nd set: 2022	1st: 3 mōli Remake: 1 'iwa, 1 mōli 2nd set: 2 mōli, 2 ka'upu
Molokai	2	2	White: mōli Black: 'iwa, ka'upu, mōli	White: 2019 Black: 2018	White: 2 mōli Black: 2 mōli, 1 'iwa
Kaua'i	2		mōli	2017	2 mōli
Ho'okena, Hawai'i	2		mōli	2018	2 ka'upu
O'ahu		2	ka'upu	2019	
<i>Total</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>10</i>			

▲ Number of lei, types of birds, and total number of birds used to create each set, by island.

Product	Parts	Bundles	Rows	Feathers	Total Birds Used
Lei hulu makahiki	Chest, tail, saddle	3 feathers/bundle, 240 bundles	4 bundles/row, 60 rows	720 feathers/lei 2,880 feathers/set	1 per lei 2 mōli, 2 ka'upu per set
Kāhili pa'a lima	Saddle, neck, tail	3 feathers/bundle, 100 bundles	5 bundles/row, 20 rows	300 feathers	<1 or a variety of species
Kāhili	Chest, saddle, tail	3 feathers/bundle, 2,000 bundles	n/a	10,000 feathers	10

▲ Type of parts and number of bundles, feathers, and birds used per traditional product.

areas of the same bird. Kāhili pa'a lima are smaller than the kāhili products previously mentioned.

**Kāhili pa'a lima for education.** The kāhili pa'a lima holds cultural significance in upholding space, summoning energies in the lewamākua realm (atmospheric space between the top of our heads to the bottom of the clouds) as ceremonial adornment, or as mythological tokens re-imagined (Hi'iaka's kāhili pa'a lima) for educational use. At the onset of the Kiamanu Project, kāhili pa'a lima were created as a way to provide opportunities for keiki to experience a cultural landscape with featherwork and seabirds that more closely resembles that of the lived experiences of a few generations ago.

Kahululeia'e may be translated as "the feather garland above us." It was created for and named by keiki visiting Nihokū at Kīlauea, Kaua'i. Keao'āhui is translated as "the cloud that gathers birds." It was created in 2017 with spare ka'upu feathers to hold space in the Makahiki ceremony at Hā'ena, Kaua'i.

**Kākau uhi.** Kākau uhi (tattooing) is a traditional practice that requires precision and attention to detail to both the surface the practitioners work with as well as the genealogies and patterns that

▼ Three generations of one 'ohana (Kauī Fu with mom and daughter) carrying Keao'āhui at Makahiki ceremonies at Limahuli, Kaua'i. KILIPAKI VAUGHN





▲ Kahuleleia'e held by kia'i keiki, November 2017. MEHANA VAUGHN

they imprint onto the kākau uhi recipients. The tool they create to make the tattoos is called mōlī and the iwi uluna mōlī (mōlī wing bone) is the piercing part of the mōlī tool used by kahuna kāuhi (kākau uhi experts). Traditionally, this practice asks for the largest, sturdiest seabird wing bone, which would be the mōlī or ka'upu. Like the lei hulu makahiki, this practice also interchanged between both mōlī and ka'upu to fulfill these requests.

The success of supporting this practice is directly related to the quality of each manu that is collected. In the Kiamanu Project, the first curing of iwi uluna took place in 2014 on Manawai/Pearl & Hermes as well as on Hōlanikū/Kure Atoll, and the methods used set the standard for curing that we still strive for today. Ideally, two months of curing in pristine



▲ Kahuna kāuhi Keli'i Mākua holds a mōlī tool, December 2019. KA PĀ HŪNŌHŪNŌHĀLANI

conditions produces the high-quality, sturdy wing bone fit to be shaped by the tool-making kāuhi practitioner. These have been distributed to kahuna kāuhi, whose ambition is to use more traditionally sourced materials for their tools.

### NĀ KIA'I NIHOKŪ

At its inception, this program began as a way for people of all ages—with specific emphasis on children to college students as well as Kilauea families—to have an opportunity to be shaped by landscapes that resemble Papahānaumokuākea. Where seabirds





▲ ▲ Mōli tools with iwi uluna. KA PĀ HŪNŌHŪNŌHĀLANI

dwelling in the same grass that one sits in to survey the broader landscape as one charts a deeper, more meaningful relationship to one's environment. At Kilauea, Kaua'i, that spot would be a federally protected coastal crater hill called Nihokū.

Native Hawaiians with similar and complementary interests came together and created a program that recognizes how the lack of access to and participation in seabird conservation, protections, and education have negatively impacted Native Hawaiians as well as the broader community. The goal is to provide safe and meaningful events in support of wildlife conservation and environmental education with a focus on strengthening appreciation and place-based understanding. The overall desired outcome

is to equip community members with knowledge and a profound understanding of a place so as to *kia'i*—steward and protect—these places and cultural resources for future generations.

From 2016–2020, before COVID19 restrictions went into effect, over 800 community members participated in events at Nihokū through the use of a USFWS Special Use Permit. There are several types of events that re-establish kilo practices (traditional multi-sensory observations): 'āina-based education, site visits, community workdays, and traditional practices such as storytelling, hula, mele/oli, huaka'i, etc., within seabird colonies. The main goal is to develop participants' understanding of the synchronicity between phenological shifts and seasonal seabird





▲ ▲ Hālau Mānuunu performing for Nihokū crater on winter solstice at Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge, December 2017. [KATHLEEN HO/USFWS](#)  
▲ Summer solstice kilo event at Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge. [KATHLEEN HO/USFWS](#)





▲ ▲ School event at Nihokū, March 2018. HŌKŪ CODY/USFWS

▲ Kūpuna Gary Smith and Refuge Manager Jen Waipa sharing mele about Nihokū, September 2015. KATHLEEN HO/USFWS



Through their life cycles, patterns, and behaviors, one can interpret the data that seabird health is widely indicative of ecological integrity and health. In this way, understanding seabirds in Hawai‘i is akin to having your hand on the pulse of the Pacific, and therefore, your hand on the pulse of the livelihood for all inhabitants in the Pacific. Quite literally, when seabirds thrive, so do we.

migrations, nesting, and foraging behaviors as a pathway towards a more meaningful relationship to seabirds, the refuge, and the community.

#### CONCLUSION—BIOCULTURAL RECONNECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The bird family holds some of time’s most tested and resilient technology—hulu (feathers). Hulu, especially hulu manukai, represent a collective power as across generations, or within a community. Due to their unique ability to reach heights beyond human capacity, hulu are connectors between the ao and pō realms, and that access to Ancestral Knowledge can impart wisdom unto the spiritual aspirations of kānaka as well.

There are 23 native seabird species in Hawai‘i that nest in burrows or on the ground, or perch atop bushes or trees. Some nest nearshore, some inland, and some ma uka (upper mountainous regions). Predators are detrimental to ground-nesting and burrow-nesting seabirds, which make up a majority of Hawai‘i seabirds (about 18 of the 23 species).

Plastics pollution, climate change, and invasive plants and animals threaten all seabirds. A high presence of native plant vegetation prevents nest erosion and is a vital lifeline to nesting, as seabirds often expend energy unnecessarily working through invasive plants to return/leave their nesting grounds. Clean oceans are, likewise, vital lifelines as all seabirds are foraging along the larger geological grooves of seamounts and

pelagic areas prolific in biomass—and which can be polluted by plastics and derelict fishing gear. Seabirds’ annual migration patterns lead, chase, or ride weather patterns, and their flight behaviors can reveal localized understandings of their age, courtship patterns, locations of schools of fish, local weather, or evidence of group learning among particular species.

Through their life cycles, patterns, and behaviors, one can interpret the data that seabird health is widely indicative of ecological integrity and health. In this way, understanding seabirds in Hawai‘i is akin to having your hand on the pulse of the Pacific, and therefore, your hand on the pulse of the livelihood for all inhabitants in the Pacific. Quite literally, when seabirds thrive, so do we. Yet the understandings of seabirds’ cultural values as timekeepers, guardians, or messengers, or their overall cultural value as quality keepers for life in Hawai‘i, remains incomplete.

What if we viewed seabirds, native plants, and other wildlife as a repository of memory for a place? What if we understood Indigenous languages and lifestyle practices as doing the same? How do we honor these lived experiences and incorporate them into our collective response to a changing climate and environment?

There is an opportunity here to weave together these different value systems around seabirds and forge a path forward that keeps them and us thriving together.



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**For you, e kō Hawai‘i.**





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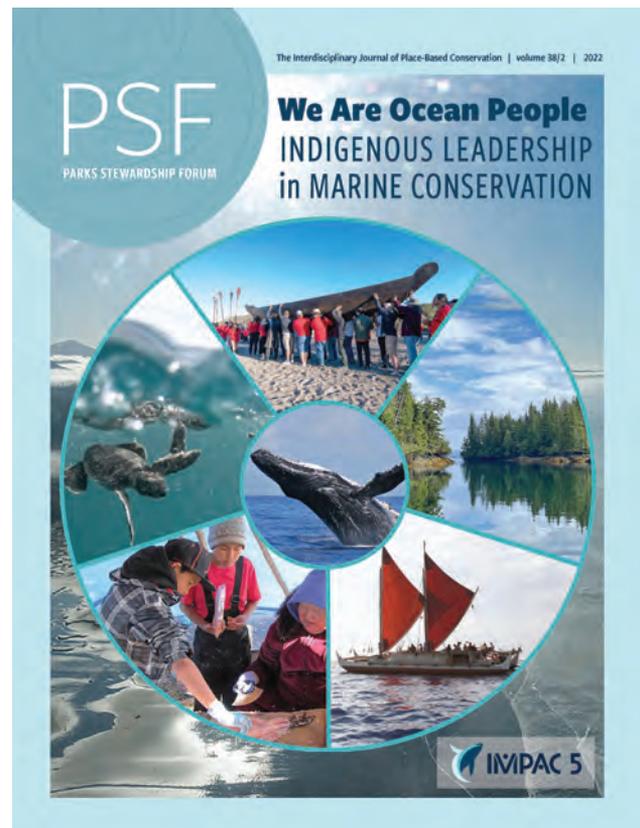
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**On the cover of this issue**

- CIRCLE DESIGN, clockwise from top:
- Northern Chumash ceremony | [ROBERT SCHWEMMER](#)
  - Haida Gwaii | [CINDY BOYKO](#)
  - The Polynesian Voyaging Society's voyaging canoe Hōkūle'a | [NOAA](#)
  - Elder teaching youths, northern Alaska | [US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE](#)
  - Baby Honu (sea turtles), Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument | [NOAA](#)
  - Center: Humpback whale, Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument | [NOAA](#)

Background: Pacific Rim National Park Reserve | [PARKS CANADA](#)