

The Nature  
Conservancy



# Hawai'i

Celebrating 40 Years  
*How It All Began*

Honoring the Nature-Culture Connection  
Responding to COVID: Physically Distanced Coral Monitoring  
Cooke Foundation Centennial



## The Health of People Reflects the Health of Nature



Convict tang and bluefin trevally inhabit a vibrant coral reef at Palmyra Atoll. ©Ian Shive

Happy 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, kākou! In 1980, the Hawai‘i chapter of The Nature Conservancy was formed with the support of many dedicated people, and I am thrilled to be a part of this legacy. This is a milestone we share with you—our partners and supporters.

While we miss face-to-face gatherings with volunteers, colleagues and donors, we’ve found ways to connect remotely. We’ve initiated Conservation Conversations—virtual events featuring talks from our leaders and partners sharing their work throughout the islands. The latest is a four-part series to celebrate our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, showcasing the people who have played vital roles in establishing TNC in Hawai‘i and their stories about how they helped advance conservation across the islands. Also in celebration of this 40-year landmark, we partnered with local sportswear retailer Kahala to design a special edition aloha shirt that features the wildlife we help protect (see back page for details).

This newsletter’s cover story traces our origins from the initial bird surveys that heralded the need to protect Hawai‘i’s native forests to the collaborative community partnerships that drive our work today.

In this issue, we are excited to introduce our new Director of Marketing and Communications, Toni Parras. Toni brings a fresh outlook to shape our visual and narrative communications, starting with this newsletter, which you may have noticed has a new look. We invite you to take our survey attached to the last page, where we want to hear your preferences on receiving print and digital communications, topics of interest, and more. Please share your thoughts with us—we look forward to hearing from you!

I am humbled by the dedication and support of our board of trustees who have guided and supported our work since the beginning. I am pleased to welcome new trustees Kris Billeter, Matt Emerson and Judith Epstein, whose deep experience and expertise will help provide guidance moving forward. Please join me in welcoming Toni, Kris, Matt and Judi to our ‘ohana!

I believe I speak for many when I say that recent events across the country and in our communities have forced us to *nalu wale iho*—or look within—and reflect on how we can make the world a little better. We are facing the convergence of three crises: climate impacts exhibited in increased fires and storms, persistent racial injustice throughout the nation, and the COVID-19 pandemic that affects our health, economy and psyche. I firmly believe the values of Hawai‘i and of the Conservancy can be our guide to push through. *I ola ‘oe, i ola au*. When you live, I live. This traditional Hawaiian value reminds us that the health of people reflects the health of nature, and the health of the environment is reflected in the health of the community.

As we navigate these unprecedented times, we thank you for your continued support as we build on four decades of experience to conserve Hawai‘i’s and Palmyra’s unique natural communities.

Mālama and mahalo a nui loa  
(take care and thank you very much),

Ulalia Woodside



©Rikki Cooke

The Nature Conservancy



Protecting nature. Preserving life.

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Ulalia Woodside

### Director of Marketing and Communications

Toni Parras

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Bernie Kim

The Nature Conservancy Hawai‘i chapter is the local affiliate of The Nature Conservancy, an international, non-profit organization based in Arlington, VA.

**The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.**

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Cover: Pēpē‘ōpae Bog in Kamakou Preserve, Moloka‘i boasts stunning colors. ©David Meunch

## Honoring the Nature-Culture Connection



An ‘i‘iwi (scarlet honeycreeper) feeds on the rare ‘ōpelo (*Lobelia grayana*) in Waikamoi Preserve on Maui. ©Jack Jeffrey

Hawai‘i is one of the remotest and biologically diverse locations on Earth. From the ‘i‘iwi (scarlet honeycreeper) that feeds on endangered lobelia flowers to the ecosystems that span the highest mountain summits to the depths of the ocean, Hawai‘i harbors plants and animals found nowhere else on Earth. This is what makes Hawai‘i a global “hotspot” for conservation.

The Native Hawaiian worldview recognizes a reciprocal and loving relationship between people and the nature around them, and considers native species as venerable ancestors. The honoring of this connection in our conservation work—and in our daily lives—makes Hawai‘i stand out as an example of how this approach can lead to sustainability in our islands, and on our planet.

To share this concept more broadly, senior scientist and cultural advisor Sam ‘Olu Gon is crafting a primer on “Biocultural Conservation” (an approach that safeguards both biological and cultural diversity) in Hawai‘i. The presentations, to be shared widely, are designed to introduce people of any background to the Hawaiian worldview and cultural significance of our species and ecosystems, with the aim of reconnecting to the natural world and restoring biocultural abundance.



Toni Parras is TNC Hawai‘i’s new Director of Marketing and Communications.  
©Toni Parras/TNC

### E Komo Mai!

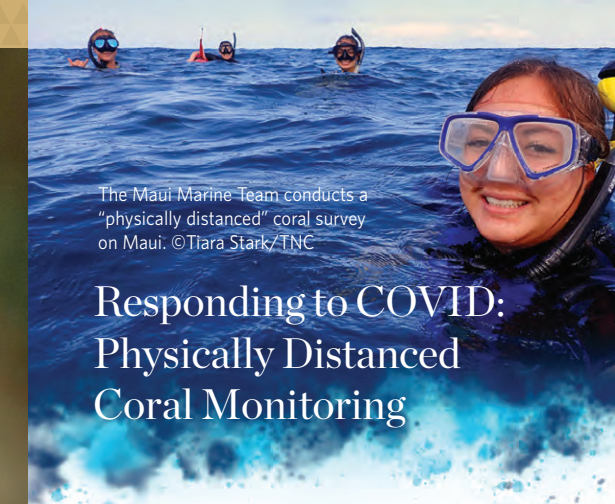
This summer we welcomed our new Director of Marketing and Communications, Toni Parras, who comes to us with decades of experience in conservation and communications.

Previously Director of Editorial and Media Relations at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, she also served as the

Communications Manager for NOAA’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries in Hawai‘i.

“Toni’s extensive experience in conservation, strategic communications and media will elevate our efforts to preserve Hawai‘i’s lands and waters,” says Executive Director Ulalia Woodside.

Over her 20+ year career, Toni has worked with world-renowned scientists, Pulitzer Prize-winning authors, high-ranking government officials, tribal clan chiefs, local fisherfolk and community leaders



The Maui Marine Team conducts a “physically distanced” coral survey on Maui. ©Tiara Stark/TNC

## Responding to COVID: Physically Distanced Coral Monitoring

For the past three years, our Maui Marine Team and partners have been monitoring and photographing 40 tagged coral colonies in order to document changes in coral health over time and record bleaching responses when the ocean is warmer than usual. The photographic timeseries tells a compelling story about reef conditions and will deepen our understanding of coral resiliency in the face of climate change. A few corals have died completely since we started monitoring, while others have shown growth and recovery over the past two years. Having a continuous dataset is important to this effort.

With the arrival of COVID-19, our team worked with TNC’s dive safety officers to establish protocols to protect our team and operate responsibly in the field. Team members drive separately to sites, handle only their own gear, wear masks on land, maintain a 6-foot distance both on land and in the water, and disinfect all equipment after surveying.

This is one example of how TNC Hawai‘i is adapting to the times to be able continue our work while safeguarding our teams from COVID-19.

around the globe. She started her career in film production, working on movies, TV and wildlife documentaries for Animal Planet, Discovery, National Geographic, ABC, NBC, the BBC and many others. She has also worked as a freelance writer and photographer.

“I am honored and excited to be working with TNC,” says Parras. “Living in balance with nature is our best hope for the future, and I look forward to sharing stories about how TNC is working toward that goal by collaborating with communities and partners to revitalize natural habitats across the islands.”



# Celebrating 40 Years

## *How It All Began* by Evelyn Wight

Before there was even a law on the books in Hawai‘i for conservation easements, local businessman Samuel Cooke and President of Moloka‘i Ranch Philip Spalding signed one for Kamakou, establishing The Nature Conservancy’s first forest preserve in Hawai‘i. It was the kind of pioneering excellence TNC is known for—informed by science, strategized with business acumen, and bolstered by strong relationships.

Spalding called it the “the most important thing I’ve done in my life.”

Establishing Kamakou Preserve on Moloka‘i, and a few years later the Waikamoi Preserve on Maui, marked the beginning of a new norm for protecting nature. This TNC model forged partnerships between local businesses, scientists, government and landowners, and was supported by philanthropists who donated their time and resources to save what Cooke called “the real Hawai‘i”—a land of incredible biological diversity and cultural connection, with spectacular landscapes, plants and animals found nowhere else on Earth.

In 1980, Henry Little, a Regional Director for TNC who assisted with the Kamakou deal, helped established the Hawai‘i state chapter—TNC’s twentieth. Little says the success of the chapter rested on hiring the right local people, such as Kelvin Taketa, who started as a field representative and then led TNC Hawai‘i as its Executive Director into the 1990s.

Little also credits a strong board, led by Cooke, that brought unlikely partners together.

“At that time, businesses and environmentalists didn’t mix and didn’t realize they had shared values,” says Little. “Sam Cooke changed that and built a powerhouse board that made everything else possible.”

While the organization recognized Hawai‘i as the endangered species capital of the world, TNC’s early staffers note that the unique natural heritage of these islands—and the threats to it—was not taught in schools while growing up in Hawai‘i.

Education and building awareness were essential components of TNC’s early work. Internship programs and lesson plans helped cultivate the next generation of local conservation professionals. *The Islands of Life*, co-authored by TNC’s Senior Scientist and Cultural Advisor Sam ‘Olu Gon and historian Gavan Daws in 1988, brought native plants and birds into people’s living rooms and thoughts.

“We were able to share the plight of our endangered birds,

insects like the happy face spider and gorgeous singing land snails, unique plants and trees,” says Taketa. “Seeing it firsthand ignited people’s passion for and pride in Hawai‘i. We built a new norm for conservation.”

During the 1980s, Hawai‘i’s population reached 1 million, teaching and learning in the Hawaiian language were restored through language immersion schools, and O‘ahu residents voted against condo development above Sandy Beach. TNC doubled its membership, opened five more preserves across four islands, and created the first comprehensive maps of Hawai‘i’s ecosystems. TNC also helped secure state and federal funding for conservation management, resulting in the first national wildlife refuge for endangered tropical forest birds in the U.S. at Hakalau on the island of Hawai‘i.

Hawaiian tree snails have unique and beautiful markings.  
© G. T. Larson



In the early 1990s, TNC mustered key partners including the state’s Division of Forestry and Wildlife, Haleakalā National Park, Maui Board of Water Supply and Haleakalā Ranch to form the first of what would become many Watershed Partnerships—voluntary alliances among private and public landowners to manage

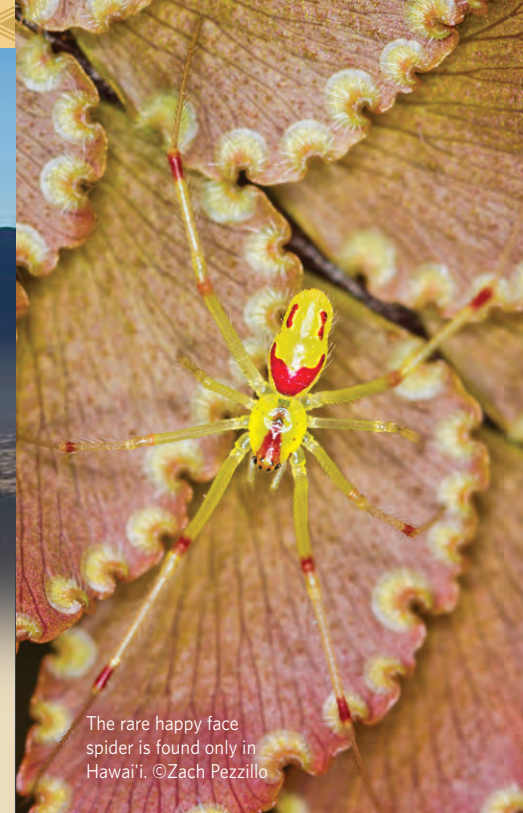
forests, a critical source of the islands’ fresh water.

The East Maui Watershed Partnership was the first of its kind, covering 100,000 acres (about half the size of New York City). Today 10 Watershed Partnerships with more than 74 public and private landowners cover 2.2 million acres across Hawai‘i—almost half the state’s land!

But even these expansive partnerships couldn’t stop the spread of threats like invasive weeds and feral animals. A 1992 TNC report found that Hawai‘i had the nation’s highest rate of invasive species due to gaps in prevention, detection and control programs. In response, TNC spearheaded the Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS) and the Invasive Species Committees, which brought together government, local farmers and ranchers, business, and community groups to combat this problem. The related Silent Invasion campaign made invasive species a household phrase.

“I am humbled by TNC’s legacy of conservation in Hawai‘i and excited to be part of the next generation guiding the way into the future,” says Ulalia Woodside, current Executive Director for the Hawai‘i chapter.

TNC continues to expand protected lands and forge partnerships to effectively manage Hawai‘i’s natural lands and the vital resources and unique species they support. Stay tuned for Part Two of our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary story, which includes the addition of a Marine Program, the acquisition of Palmyra Atoll, and a deeper focus on the nature-culture connection.

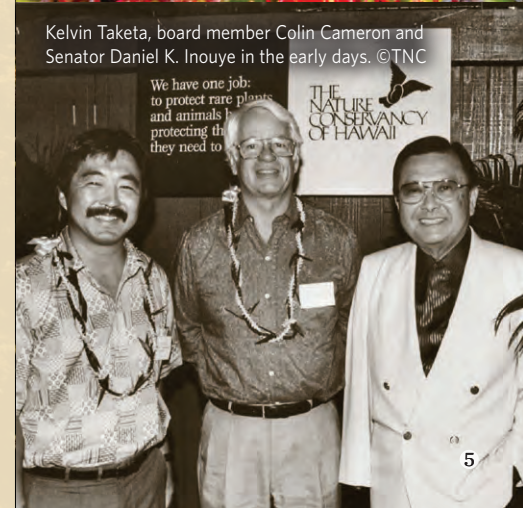


The rare happy face spider is found only in Hawai‘i. ©Zach Pezzillo



The ‘ākohekohe (crested honeycreeper) is found only on Maui. ©TNC

TNC field staffer takes in the splendor of Waikamoi Preserve. © Ian Shive



Kelvin Taketa, board member Colin Cameron and Senator Daniel K. Inouye in the early days. ©TNC

We have one job: to protect rare plants and animals by protecting the land they need to

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY OF HAWAII





Kupu AmeriCorps member Lori Lorenzo plants a loulu seedling in TNC's Kona Hema Preserve to honor a Legacy Club member. ©Christopher Balzotti/TNC

## Celebrating Legacy Club Members

Mahalo to our newest Legacy Club members who have made a lasting gift to protect Hawai'i's lands and waters for generations to come. In their honor, we planted and dedicated rare native loulu palms (*Pritchardia schattaueri*) in Kona Hema Preserve on Hawai'i Island.

If you would like to create a legacy for conservation in your will, trust, retirement plan or life insurance, or if you have already named TNC in your estate plans, please let us know. We would be delighted to welcome you to the Legacy Club and plant a loulu in your honor. We have 50 loulu to dedicate each year, and 500 over the next decade.

Contact: Lara Siu, (808) 587-6235, [lsiu@tnc.org](mailto:lsiu@tnc.org).

Loulu dedicated to:  
Mark & Lori Admiral  
Paul & Tanya Alston  
Paula & Carl Bonham  
Anne Carter  
Joyce Chung & René Lacerte  
Laureen Elizabeth  
Dr. Jean Kenyon  
Eric & Kathee LeBuse  
Elizabeth McCutcheon  
Melinda & Harold Mizuno  
Douglas Perrine & Lisa Diaz  
Louisa P. Sizemore  
In honor of Finnegan Tice-Bavoso  
In memory of Wilma Ann Tice

## Stand Up for Nature

Every acre we protect, every reef we restore, every species we shelter, and every community we support—begins with you. Your commitment and generosity make a lasting impact on Hawai'i's lands and waters, now and into the future.

Please consider a gift in honor of our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary to keep our mission strong into the next 40 years. Visit [support.nature.org/hawaii](https://support.nature.org/hawaii).

Mahalo for your support!

The Nature Conservancy, Hawai'i Chapter

## Cooke Foundation Centennial



Cooke Foundation Board of Trustees ©Joseph Esser Photography

As we look back on The Nature Conservancy's 40 years in Hawai'i, we are deeply appreciative of those donors and supporters who have consistently nurtured our work, growth and success. One of these special supporters is The Cooke Foundation, Ltd.

Anne Rice Cooke formed the Cooke Foundation in 1920 with the mission of helping "all worthy endeavors for the betterment and welfare of [the Hawai'i] community" flourish. In the 100 years since, this family foundation has been a significant factor in the growth of communities and services in Hawai'i, supporting over 300 nonprofit organizations.

The Nature Conservancy in Hawai'i is one of those organizations the Cooke Foundation has helped enable to succeed. In 1981, Sam Cooke, then-president of the foundation, was selected to be founding Chairman of the Board of Governors of the newly formed Hawai'i chapter of TNC, and served in various board leadership roles until 1992. In those early years, Sam directed campaigns that raised at least \$15M for the protection

of more than 50,000 acres of key conservation lands in the state.

Gregory Wrenn, after 22 years of working with the foundation, stepped into the role of president in 2017. Wrenn says Hawai'i remains a source of inspiration as he and the board consider how the foundation can best support the vital work taking place in the islands.

"I think about the beauty of Hawai'i, this profound beauty that can't be found anywhere else in the world," says Wrenn. "It's so important to support causes that care about the environment, to support the protection of the beauty and health of our ecosystems far into the future."

Since 1981, the Cooke Foundation has donated over \$1 million to TNC Hawai'i. Wrenn feels preserving and protecting the environment of Hawai'i is deeply important. "The years of commitment and trust in our work has led the Foundation to name TNC as one of five annual grant recipients," Wrenn says.

Wrenn acknowledges it can be hard to plan for the future,

especially after witnessing just how uncertain the future can be. Nonetheless, he says one thing is certain: Conservation will always be important to the health of Hawai'i. Wrenn is confident that the Cooke Foundation will continue to value and support the conservation work of TNC and hopes that the partnership between the two organizations will continue to make a significant positive impact on all the islands and their communities.

"I'm very proud of the work of the Cooke Foundation," says Wrenn, "and I feel a very strong

sense of commitment to what my great-great-grandmother started for Hawai'i. Giving back to the community is very important to us because Hawai'i is important to us, and the Cooke Foundation will continue to work to be at the forefront of the collaborations that will transform Hawai'i, in conservation and beyond."

We at TNC Hawai'i are grateful for the many years of support from the Cooke Foundation, and are thrilled to celebrate their centennial as we celebrate our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.



Cooke Foundation support has enabled native wildlife to return, like this endangered ae'o (Hawaiian black-necked stilt) to a lo'i kalo (taro patch) at He'eia on O'ahu.

©Sean Marrs/TNC

## New Trustees

### KRIS BILLETER

Kris is an investor with broad and deep corporate experience. For nearly 30 years, she built a management consulting practice, KB Ventures, working with over 50 companies in a wide range of industries including real estate, consumer products, health care, financial services, marketing/advertising and recreation. "Nature has always been a respite for me. The ocean has been a place of abundant joy, and I believe nature can provide this sense of rejuvenation for all of us. Safeguarding our natural resources is becoming increasingly critical, and ultimately our lives depend on it."



### MATT EMERSON

Matt is senior executive vice president of Bank of Hawai'i and a member of the bank's Executive Committee. He oversees the bank's Retail Lending, Consumer Deposits, and Credit Card businesses. "My 9-year-old son has spent more time at the beach this summer than he has over the past several years combined. Because of this, I've become more appreciative of the natural beauty we are surrounded by here in Hawai'i. We are truly lucky to live in such a wonderful place, and I'm excited to be part of TNC's efforts in Hawai'i to restore and sustain that beauty for generations to come."



### JUDI EPSTEIN

Now retired, Judi was a review judge for the State Bar Court of California, a law partner at Crosby Heafey Roach & May in Oakland, CA, and general counsel for Valent USA. She has a background in media, corporate and environmental law, and has taught ethics at the University of San Francisco School of Law and constitutional law at the University of California, Berkeley School of Journalism. Judi has been providing pro bono counsel for TNC Hawai'i and the Asia Pacific Region on climate and marine conservation efforts. "The rich environments of Hawai'i and Palmyra offer a unique opportunity to learn about resiliency in nature and how native flora and fauna contribute to a healthy ecosystem."







# CELEBRATING 40 YEARS IN HAWAII



Images courtesy of Kahala. Visit [Kahala.com](http://Kahala.com).



This special edition aloha shirt entitled 'Āina Pūlama Mau, meaning "islands forever treasured" in Hawaiian, celebrates the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i, and features over 30 species of native flora and fauna designed in striking detail by Kahala with guidance from TNC's scientists and Hawaiian cultural advisors. A portion of the proceeds goes toward supporting The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i.



The Nature Conservancy 

