

OHA STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT



Mo'omeheu

# 'Io: The Hawaiian Hawk

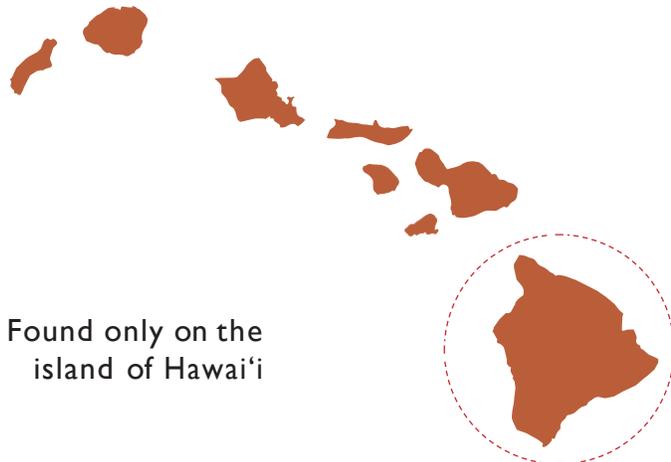
## Introduction

The 'io or Hawaiian hawk (*Buteo solitarius*) is an endemic raptor found solely in the forests of Hawai'i Island, although Wilson and Evans (1890–1899) reported 'io on Ni'ihau, Moloka'i, and Kaua'i in the past. The name 'io comes from the chirping sound that the hawk makes, "io, io," and because 'io means swift-flying (Puku'i & Elbert, 1986). A century earlier, Kepelino (1859) wrote of the hawk, "It is named for its cry" (p. 265).

FIGURE 1. Current range of the Hawaiian Hawk.



Photo. Bret Nainoa Mossman



Source. <https://usfwspacific.tumblr.com/post/177107639145/species-spotlight-hawaiian-hawk>

### OHA RESEARCH DISCLAIMER:

*The data presented have been vetted for accuracy; however, there is no warranty that it is error-free. The data itself does not represent or confer any legal rights of any kind. Please use suggested citation and report discrepancies to the OHA Research Division.*

### SUGGESTED CITATION:

Akana, K. (2022). 'Io: The Hawaiian Hawk. Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Research Division: Honolulu, HI.



## Early Documentation of 'io

Captain Cook sighted “Brown Hawks and Kites” on his stop in Hawai‘i in his search for the North-West Passage (Handy, 1941, p. 136). However, it was not until the U.S. Exploring Expedition, led by Lieutenant Charles Wilkes, that the first scientific observation was made by the team’s ornithologist, Titian R. Peale, who described the ‘io as such:

The Buzzard was seen at the island of Hawaii and from what we could learn from the natives, does not inhabit any other island of the group. It appears to have all the characteristic habits of the genus; sits solitary on dead trees, patiently watching small birds which constitute its principal food. (Peale, 1848, p. 63)

Eventually, the British ornithologist and explorer Scott Blanchard Wilson was sent by his professor to Hawai‘i in 1887 to study its endemic birds. He returned home to write *Aves Hawaiiensis* with fellow ornithologist Arthur Humble Evans. The both of them documented and illustrated three color phases of the ‘io:



Source. Wilson & Evans (1890-1899)

1. Back, wings and tail brown and blackish brown, breast whitish with brown flecking, head dark brown with darker flecking.
  2. Back, wings and tail dark brown barred and blackish brown, breast brown with blackish flecking, head blackish brown.
  3. Back, wings and tail brown with yellow tinge with dark brown flecking, breast light-yellow, head yellow with brown fleckings.
- (Wilson & Evans, 1890-1899, plates 61, 62, 63)

They described the beak as black and the legs and feet as yellow in all phases. Handy (1941, p. 157) described these phases using the Hawaiian terms, not necessarily in Wilson’s order, as ‘io mea, ‘io ehū, and ‘io uli. The latter, ‘io uli (dark hawk), may have been the most venerated hawk, which is consistent with the highly preferred Hawaiian ceremonial offerings of pua’a hiwa (black pig), niu hiwa (dark coconut) and ‘awa hiwa (dark skinned kava). Puku‘i, however, names ‘io mea as the Sacred One (andy, 1941, p. 153).

All three ornithologists—Wilson, Evans, and Peale—observed the ‘io on Hawai‘i Island. However, Wilson and Evans (1890–1899) included sightings on Ni‘ihau and Moloka‘i and a curious story of an ‘io sighting on Kaua‘i in their publication *Aves Hawaiiensis*:

Mr. G. H. Dole [Judge Sanford Dole’s brother] while riding one day in Koloa, Island of Kauai, accompanied by a Scotch terrier, noticed one of these birds and was led by his peculiar movements to watch carefully. The bird appeared much disturbed by the presence of the dog, and after circling about him a few times flew to a pile of stones and took one in his claws and flew back with it to its old position over the dog and balanced himself in the air as if intending to drop it on the dog’s back, but after some apparent hesitation he gave up whatever he was intending to accomplish with the stone, and carrying it back, he placed it on the pile whence he had taken it. (p. 180)

The intelligence displayed by the hawk in this story may account for Hawaiian beliefs about the superior intelligence, judgement, and insight of the bird.



## Traditional Accounts of ‘Io

The ‘io is considered to be an ‘aumakua, or family guardian and deity, by some Hawaiian families, including the Kamehameha family according to Taylor (1931) and Emory (1942, p. 207). While recognizing that ‘io are kinolau, or body forms, of ‘aumakua, Puku‘i did not associate the bird with any particular deity. However, Puku‘i did recount a family story in which her grandmother beseeched a hawk to discontinue preying upon her baby chicks:

Once an io bird pounced on one of Grandmother’s chicks. She never threw a stone or grumbled, but sat for a while and then said: “Forgive, Io, the hasty speech by my mouth. You have never hurt except when we bring it upon ourselves. I have long ago said that the chickens belonged to the little granddaughter, but others have belied that speech, have come in my absence and taken a few for themselves. These belong to a new batch of chickens, but still the words have been longstanding so I beg your pardon, Io.” (Handy, 1941, p. 139)

According to Puku‘i, the granddaughter in the story, the ‘io never returned. An interview conducted with Puku‘i’s aunt Pu‘uheana further attested to the sacred nature of the hawk:

He akua nui o Io, he akua kapu loa ahe hoopukapuka wale ia o ka inoa. O ke kino io ke kino nana hewa, nana pono. O kona kaulike ia, he hoopa‘i ka hewa a he apono i ka pono. O ke kino pueo oia ke kino hoopakele i ke kanaka mai ka po ino mai. No ke kapu o kona inoa ua kapa ko kakou, kupuna iaia i Kanekupahu‘a no ke ku o kona kino i ka hu‘a o ka laau. O Kane-pueo kekahi inoa, o Ku‘emanu kekahi a he nui wale aku no na inoa.

Translation: Io is a great *akua*, an *akua* of great sanctity whose name is not to be revealed carelessly. The hawk-body that sees evil and sees the right. It is this body of his that executes justice, punishing sin and approving righteousness. The owl-body that gives a person protection from any impending harm. Because of the sacredness of his name, our forbears named him Kane-ku-pahu‘a [Man-standing-at-the-forest-border] because his bird body had its place at the edge of the forest. Owl-man [Kane-pueo] is another name, Ku‘emanu is another amongst many more names. (Handy, 1941, p. 139)

It should be emphasized, that the informant spoke only about her family traditions of Ka‘ū on the island of Hawai‘i. The relationship between ‘io and pueo (owl) will be discussed later.

In ‘*Ōlelo No‘eau*, the highest chiefs were called ‘io as expressed in the following proverbs:

### He ‘io au, ‘a‘ohe lālā kau ‘ole.

*I am a hawk; there is no branch on which I cannot perch.*

[I can go anywhere I please; I am a chief.]

Source: ‘*Ōlelo No‘eau*, #638

### He ‘io au, he manu i ka lewa lani.

*I am an ‘io, the bird that soars in the heavenly space.*

[A boast. The highest chiefs were often called ‘io (hawk), king of the Hawaiian birds.]

Source: ‘*Ōlelo No‘eau*, #639



Photo. Argue (n.d.) for digital sketch:  
<https://www.mybirdingjourney.com/hawaiian-hawk-io/>

‘Io played the role of judge and king of the birds in the mo‘olelo (story) of “The Naughty ‘Elepaio” as told by Puku‘i and Curtis (1985, pp. 105–107). Akana (1991) used this story as an example of corrective or retributive justice. In the story, ‘Elepaio (Hawaiian monarch flycatcher) pecked upon the huewai (water gourd) of a traveler, thereby emptying its contents of precious water. In retaliation, the man threw a stone at the little bird, injuring it. ‘Elepaio sought justice from other birds of the forest but finally left the decision to ‘Io, who acted as the all-seeing and all-knowing adjudicator. Upon questioning by ‘Io, ‘Elepaio confessed to his hala (transgression). ‘Io sent ‘Elepaio away as the little bird was deserving of punishment for costly act. In his analysis of this story, Handy



(1941) concluded that “the hawk must be the embodiment of a deity having to do with sin, who has some quality of omnipresence attributed to it.” This aspect was also alluded to in the Pu’uheana interview.

A popular song stems from this story of “The Naughty ‘Elepaio.” Here below is the source of the song that is based on a conversation between ‘Io and ‘Elepaio. It is accompanied by a string figure for a water gourd, which was recorded in Dickey (1928, pp. 39–41).

[‘Elepaio] “E ‘Io e, e ‘Io e Ua pa wau i ka pohaku a ke kanaka.” [‘Io] “No wai ka hala?” [‘Elepaio] “No‘u ka hala.” Ka pao ana i ka hewai a ke kanaka.” [‘Io] Hewa ha oe.. Hookolo ia i ka Hui manu a kakou.” (p. 41)	Oh, Hawk! Oh, Hawk! The man hit me with a stone Whose fault is it? It is my fault. Pecking holes in the man’s water gourd Your fault indeed. You will be tried at our Court of birds (p. 41)
--	---

FIGURE 2. Malia Solomon of Ulu Mau Village in He’eia admiring Dr. Kilohana Mitchell’s handling of the pala’ie (loop and ball game).



Source: <https://www.staradvertiser.com/2019/06/02/photo-gallery/back-day-photos-hawaii-past-20190602/>

A recently published book, *The Naughty ‘Elepaio*, as retold by Malia Kruger, was also printed in Hawaiian as *No ka ‘Elepaio Kolohe*.

In “The Sweet-Potato Thief” (Puku’i & Curtis, 1985, pp. 74–77), ‘Io teaches Pueo (Owl) how to hunt the ‘iole (rats) that were plundering his sweet potato patch. Pueo ceased being vegetarian thereafter and becomes a carnivorous scavenger (a zoological designation) like ‘Io. The two birds become interconnected thereafter in lore and in spiritual matters.

Lastly, the following chant suggests the hawk’s role as a helper and a savior-type. It is accompanied by a loop and ball game called pa- la’ie in which the ball represents the ‘io searching for a perch (the loop) from which, with its keen eyesight, it could locate water for the thirsty traveler.

E kau, e kau e ‘Io ē E pi’i i wai no kāua I hea ka wai e ki’i ai? I uka wale o Nini’ole He aha ka lā’au e kau ai? He ‘ōhi’a lā, a he lama O hele ka hōkū, ka malama Kau pū me ka māhinahina Na wai ke ahi kau ‘ui’uiki Na Pele mā i Kilauea. (Mitchell, 1992, p. 190)	Perch, perch o ‘io bird Go upland to get us some water Where shall I find the water? In the far upland of Nini’ole On what trees shall I perch? On the ‘ōhi’a or lama The stars set, the night lights shine And the dim moon above. Whose light is blinking yonder? It belongs to Pele’s family at Kilauea. (Trans., M. K. Puku’i)
---	--

Significantly, the keen eyesight of the ‘io was noted by Kepelino who wrote:

It is much admired and praised by people. Because it flies so high and can see objects from a great height... it is called the ‘io way up above (‘io-lani), or the ‘io-that-sees-everywhere on the land (*ka-‘io-nui-maka-lana-aumoku*). This is the whole name of our present king [Kamehameha IV]. ‘Io-lani-ka-‘io-nui-maka-lana-aumoku. It means the chief above all chiefs, the ruler of the kingdom... If a person wishes to brag of his skill in tree climbing, he boastfully says, ‘I am an ‘io bird, there is no branch that I can not reach (*he ‘io au, aohe lala pili ole*)’... If a boy is clever in stealing, he is called a chicken-catching hawk (*‘io po’i moa*).” (Translation in Emory, 1942, p. 205)



## 'Io in Chanted Text

Mele or chanted texts contain important cultural information such as for 'Io. The first text concerns two brothers, Maka'iole and Kamiki, who are trained in Hawaiian martial arts by their grandmother in the mysterious uplands of Kona. They must undergo an 'ūniki (graduation) process as well as demonstrate their skills by challenging various experts in their district. In response to Kamiki's call for help during a challenge, the older brother, Maka'iole, chanted the following:

Io e, Io e	O Io, O Io
Io i'ō ka manu	Io who is truly the bird
Ka manu o kuu kupuna wahine	My grandmother's bird
Na Io nui hoanoano	It is the great, holy Io
Nana e popo'i ka aiwa o ka lani	Who pounces on the supernatural ones of the heavens
He lani manu, he aewa	The bird is a heavenly one, he flies in space
Aohe lala kau ole	There is no branch upon which he does not perch
Kau i ka lala maloo	He perches on dry branches
I ka lala maka	[And] on living branches
("Kamiki," 1916, March 9)	(Puku'i, K., Trans.)

The second chanted text concerns Kamehameha. When Kamehameha returned to Kamakahonu, Kona and was on his deathbed, a kahuna (priest) was summoned from Maui to advise the dying king. Here below are the beginning lines of a longer chant that addressed the four major male deities of Kū, Kāne, Kanaloa, and Lono, as well as Uli and Io:

Kuli'a, e Uli, ka pule kalanaola,	Lift up. O Uli, the life-giving prayer
Kuli'a imua,	Lift it in front,
Kuli'a i Kealohilani,	Lift it to Kealohilani (The shining-heavens)
E kulia	Lift
E ui aku ana i ke kupuna o luna nei,	[We] are appealing to the ancestors up here,
O wai kupuna?	Who are the ancestors?
O wai ka eu o luna nei?	Who are the lively ones up here?
O Io-uli o ka lani, o Io-ehu,	Io-uli of heaven, Io the red-headed,
o Io-mea	Io the Sacred one,
O Ku-ke-ao-loa, o Ku-ke-ao-poko	Ku of the long cloud, Ku of the short cloud
O Ku-i-ka-awihiwihī-ula-o-ka-lani	Ku of the red fringed clouds of heaven
O kanaka loloa o ka mauna la	The tall men of the mountains
O Ku-pulupulu i ka nahele e	O Ku-pulupulu of the forest
(Handy, 1941, p. 153)	(Puku'i, K., Trans.)



## ‘Io and the Cult of ‘Iolani

The first mention in Hawaiian literature of ‘Io the Supreme Being was published in an article entitled “The Cult of Iolani” by Emma Ahuena Taylor in 1931. Taylor was a writer and historian and received an appointment to the Hawaiian Historical and Hawaiian Folklore Commissions in the 1920s. Later, she became an officer of the Hawaiian Historical Society along with her husband. Both positions in the literary world at the time were rare for women and especially for Native Hawaiians.

In the 1930s, Taylor published many articles for the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* such as “Vengeance of Pele” (1930), the “Legend of Puahuula” (1930), “Poki—Guardian dog of Moanalua” (1935), as well as the article on the cult of ‘Io-lani. The information and chants shared in that article came from a manuscript written by her mother and famed composer Mary Jane Montano. Of interest, many of Montano’s notes revealed the influence of Christianity, as evidenced in the following:

- The Priesthood of Iolani was the highest priesthood of the islands of Hawaii.
- Io is the Holy Spirit, the invisible someone; the only symbol on earth is the young eyes that see at night [the pueo is diurnal].
- Keliimaikai [Brother of Kamehameha] was an Alii Kapu Akua of Io
- Io to us is Jehovah to other peoples.

(Handy, 1941, p. 146)

Up until the publication of the cult article, there were no known documents or recordings regarding ‘Io or Io as a Supreme Being. Mary Kawena Puku‘i and Kenneth Emory both believed that the “breaking-down of the ancient religion which resulted in the revelation of all those about what we have learned was such that no cult of importance is likely to have survived until 1932, then to be revealed for the first time” (Emory, 1942, p. 206).

Even so, Taylor wrote that “some of the older generations have a tradition that Io left Hawaii when the chieftain Hema departed for New Zealand to live after his feudal warfare with his brother Puna” (In Handy, 1941, p. 146). Apparently, Taylor wanted to make as many connections as possible to the Māori to support that tradition and asserted that their belief in Io was the same as the Hawaiian worship of ‘Io. In addition, her writings implied that the Māori notion of Io came from Hawai‘i. Emory (1942, p. 201) suggested that Taylor’s contact with Māori occurred in the 1920s when Mormons from New Zealand began visiting the Hawai‘i temple at Lā‘ie, O‘ahu. Supporting that assumption was an annual report of the Hawaiian Historical Society (1921) that said,

a number of Maoris from New Zealand were in Honolulu last Spring. It was interesting to watch some of the Hawaiians trace the race connection between themselves and the Maoris, and also note the confidence with which the Maoris confused Hawaii of Asia with the Hawaiian islands. (p. 7)

In addition, the Daughters and Sons of Hawaiian Warriors, for which Taylor served as kuhina nui (president), lavishly entertained Māori visitors (Emory, 1942, p. 202).

Lastly, it should be noted that during the same period in New Zealand, “textualization [of Io the Supreme Being] allowed the European to complete by 1924 the intellectual colonization of the most tantalizing elusive aspect of Māori society: their inner beliefs on ultimate questions” (Simpson, 1997, p. 85). Simpson noted that the first occurrence of “Io” as “Supreme Being” was in 1876 (p. 60). As a final note, the Māori cognate for the Hawaiian ‘Io is Kio. Taylor did not address this obvious discrepancy in her effort to equate the Māori cult of Io to the Hawaiian cult of ‘Iolani.



## 'Io as a Kinolau (Body Form of a God)

In a response given above by Puku'i's aunt Pu'uheana, she talked about the hawk-body that "sees evil and sees the right" and the owl-body that "gives a person protection from any impending harm" (Handy, 1941, p. 139). Taylor believed that the two were the same and asserted that Owl is the symbol of 'Io (In Handy, 1942, p. 142) because it "can see at night and is all seeing" (pueo are diurnal) and that Ku'e-manu-ai-lehua was a name for 'Io (1931, p. 78). In reaction to this assertion, Emory (1942, p. 204) reported that "Kawena [Puku'i] was surprised at the implication that the owl was an embodiment of 'Io, the Hawk, and maintains that Kane-ku-pahua and Ku'e-manu are distinctly owl-gods." Pu'uheana stated this clearly. Nevertheless, Taylor contended that the god Uli was called a hawk and therefore equivalent to 'Io the Supreme Being. She provided the following prayer as evidence of her assertion:

O 'io lani oe, o ka maka iwa uli,  
O Uli nana hewa,  
O Uli nana pono

Thou art the sky hawk, the eyes of the frigate bird  
O Uli that discerns the right  
O Uli that discerns the wrong

Handy (1941, p. 139) supported Taylor's interpretation which was based on Nathaniel Emerson's translation of the same chant that was recorded much earlier in Malo (1951). He also noted that Pu'uheana's description of the hawk-body that "sees evil and sees the right" were the precise qualities ascribed to Uli. If these suppositions were true, Emory (1942) contended that the hawk was more likely a kinolau (body form) of Uli. He then provided other connections of birds in Hawaiian religion. For example, the god Kumukahi took the form of a kōlea (plover), and his brother Palamoa took the form of a moa (rooster), and Kane-i-ka-pahua and Kane-ku-pahua took owl forms (p. 206). Furthermore, according to Malo (1951), those who practiced sorcery "worshipped Ku-koa'e, Uli, and Ka-alae-nui-a-Hina. Ku-koa'e is Ku-the-tropic bird; Ka-alae-nui-a-Hina is The-great-mud-hen-of-Hina" (p. 100). Though Malo did not point out Uli as having the hawk form, it seemed logical to Emory and also consistent with the texts in both Taylor's and Malo's prayer that the 'io was a body-form, or kinolau, of Uli.



Photo. William "Yama" Chillingworth



## ‘Io and Uli

In 1888, Kalākaua listed 83 important Hawaiian gods. ‘Io was not included, but Uli was recorded as “the god of the sorcerers, the god appealed to by the kahunas in praying people to death” (Kalākaua & Daggert, 1888, p. 50). Neither Malo (1773–1853) nor Kepelino (1830–1878) mentioned ‘Io as a god in their writing on Hawaiian religion. Taylor, however, believed that ‘Io was a god, in fact the Supreme God, and provided several chants to support her claim. One of the chants that Taylor used to support her claim appeared in Handy (1941, p. 125):

E Io e, E Io e	O Hawk, O Hawk
He kukala hale ke kanaka	A man stands and calls in his house
Aohe akua nana e ae	There is no god that sees beyond
Ke kapu kuahiwi	The tabu of the mountains
O Iolani oe o ka maka o iwa uli	Thou art Sky-hawk with eye like the dark frigate-bird
O Uli nana hewa	Dark [One] that sees the wrong
O Uli nana pono	Dark [One] that sees the right
E aloha mai oe i kau pulapula	Cherish thou this thy child
E ho‘opakele mai	Oh deliver
I na poino e hikilele mai ana	From the evil that affrights
E nana iho oe	Look thou down [and see]
I ka mea nana wau i hana ino mai	The person I see working evil hither
Elieli kau mai Amama ua noa	[The last two lines are a conventional closure for solemn prayers]

Ahuena Taylor considered this chant too sacred to publish herself in “Cult of ‘Iolani” but provided it to Handy as proof of her claim that ‘Iolani, or Sky-Hawk, and Uli-nana-hewa (Dark-one that sees the wrong) and Uli-nana-pono (Dark-one that sees the wrong) were the same god. However, as pointed out earlier in Malo (1951), those who practiced sorcery “worshipped Ku-koa’e, Uli, and Ka-alae-nui-a-Hina. Ku-koa’e is Ku-the-tropic bird; Ka-alae-nui-a-Hi-na is The-great-mud-hen-of-Hina” (p. 100). Again, while the bird-form of Uli was not specified by Malo, it seemed logical to Emory that the ‘io was the kinolau (body-form) of Uli (Emory, 1942, p. 206).

Taylor asserted that ‘Io the Supreme Being and Uli, the god listed by Kalākaua, were one and the same (Handy, 1941, p. 140). She and Handy based their assumption on a line taken from a malo- (loincloth) girding chant that combined the two names into Io-uli [Io and Uli]. This name appears as a footnote provided by N. B. Emerson in a malo chant for Kū during the dedication of a luakini (temple).

Honua-ku-kapu ka malo o Io-uli  
Decorated at its end is the malo of the bird-god Io-uli.  
(Malo, 1951, p. 186)

However, Emory noted that in the chant, the image of Kū was girded with the Malo-lani-kailoa of the god Uli, followed by Hina-lu‘u-loa as the malo of Hina, He-ua-lele as the malo of Kū, Aulana as the malo of Lono-kai-olohia, then Honua-ku-kapu as the malo of Io-uli, and Ka-malo-puhano-ku-kapi of Kane‘aukaha. Finally, the malo ‘oloa, a sacred malo that was bleached in the sea was girded on. While Handy (1941, p. 149) inferred that all the malo listed are one, and therefore ‘Io and Uli are one, they are clearly not (Emory, 1942, p. 200).



## ‘Io and Pueo

Previously, Puku‘i and Curtis described the pilina (relationship) between the pueo and ‘io in “The Sweet-Potato Thief.” As well, Ahuena Taylor saw a pilina between the two birds to Io the Supreme Being.

Additionally, Malo (1951) recorded that “the pueo, or owl and the io resemble each other, but the *pueo* has the larger head.” However, in regard to the veneration of the two, he only mentioned that “the *pueo* [owl] is regarded as a deity and worshipped by many” (p. 38) but did not mention the ‘io.

A few examples of pueo acting as protector-rescuers can be found in Westervelt (1913, pp. 127–137). The first is about Pueo, who rescued and revived the beautiful but battered and abused Kahalaomapuana of Mānoa. The second story concerned Kapoi of Kewalo, who built a heiau to honor the pueo he had stolen eggs from, and the third is when Kapoi was captured by Kākuhihewa for building that heiau. Kapoi’s impending sacrifice initiated the greatest battle between man and the pueo ever recorded. Kapoi’s owl god called all the pueo armies from many islands to rescue him. Lastly, Taylor (1931) related a story of Kahuku‘iikawaia, a mentor-teacher to Kamehameha, who was saved from falling off the pali (cliff) in the battle of Nu‘uanu when a pueo struck his face with its wing (In Handy, 1941, p. 140). Such stories of pueo rescuing people in Hawaiian newspapers are too numerous to include here.

Both ‘io and pueo often frequented the altars and sacrificial pits of luakini where animal and human sacrifices were exposed. According to Handy (1941), “This habit would also logically lead to the association of Hawk and Owl with vengeance upon malefactors (human sacrifices on the altars were kapu breakers)” (p. 143). The vengeance-seeking aspect of the pueo is illustrated in a temple ceremony where a man wearing a headdress of the hair of an ancestor stands and points a spear to the congregants saying, “Hekue, hekue, e ku auanei i ka ihe a pueo. Take care, take care or you will be struck by the spear of Pueo!” (Fornander, 1918, pp. 8–9).

Pueo appeared to be regarded as high chiefs. Consider these lines from the genealogical chant of Wākea:

It was Piimai, Wailoa, and Kakaihili  
That was settled by the royal owl,  
The owl of the still eyes (expression indicative of a high chief).  
(Fornander, 1916, p. 14)

Thus, the role of the owl was more than an ‘aumakua or family guardian. Like the ‘io, pueo were associated with priests, temples, and the high chiefs.

## ‘Iolani as a Personal Name

In his article on indigenous birds, Kepelino (1859) wrote about the hawk, saying:

It is called ‘io way up above (‘io-lani), or ‘io-hat-sees-with-its-eyes-everywhere on the land (*ka-‘io-nui-maka-lan[a]-aumoku*). This is the whole name of our present king (Kamehameha 4), ‘Io-lani-ka-‘io-nui-maka-lana-aumoku. It means the chief above all chiefs, the ruler of the kingdom. (p. 265)

Taylor (1942) believed that the esoteric name ‘Iolani was so sacred that it should not have been conferred on Kamehameha II and Kamehameha IV, as it led to the extinction of the Kamehameha dynasty (p. 78). Rather, the accepted cause was moving the capital of the kingdom from Lāhaina to Honolulu and building a royal residence at Keone‘aiali‘i (the sands which consumes chiefs) at Waikīkī (Emory, 1942, p. 202).

‘Iolani is the name of the present royal palace in Honolulu, which was built by Kalākaua from 1879–1882. The palace retained the name given previously by Kamehameha V in memory of his brother Kamehameha IV who was known as ‘Iolani. Kamehameha V made plans to build his own palace, which he would name Ali‘iōlani Hale, using buildings which today house the Hawai‘i Supreme Court. However, being the pragmatist that he was, he instead converted the buildings into executive offices, the legislature, and the courts.

Another place of note named ‘Iolani is the private school previously known as ‘Iolani College (a branch of St. Alban’s College) which was located on Bates Street in Kaliu, Nu‘uanu. St. Alban’s College operated in Pauoa until 1887, and ‘Iolani moved between Nu‘uanu and Honolulu and finally to its Ala Wai site in 1946. The school was named



for Kamehameha IV, who, with his wife, Queen Emma, were great supporters of the Anglican Church coming to Hawai'i. They supported St. Andrew's Cathedral and the Anglican diocese (later the Episcopal diocese). When Emma as queen dowager traveled to Europe and the United States in 1865 and 1866, she raised \$50,000 (\$932,000 today) for the Anglican mission in Hawai'i and bought the blueprints for the cathedral.

The most famous person of contemporary times was probably 'Iolani Luahine, regarded as "Hawai'i's last great exponent of the sacred hula ceremony" according to the *New York Times* (Tanner, 2004). She was born Harriet Lanihau Makekau and suffered from an eye ailment. A family friend suggested that her name should be changed to 'Iolani as revealed to her in a dream. The girl's eyes cleared up after the name change (Emory, 1942, p. 203). The clear insight and vision of the 'io was believed to have transferred to the newly named 'Iolani.

## Summary

The 'io was regarded as an 'aumakua (family guardian) by some Hawaiian families and was thought to be the kinolau (body form) of the god/goddess Uli, described as the "god of sorcerers" by Kalākaua but who was actually petitioned to counter sorcery as Uli-nānā-hewa (Dark-one that sees the wrong) and Uli-nānā-pono (Dark-one that sees the wrong). The high reverence and respect for the bird meant that it was never harmed or hunted, lest, as with the pueo, vengeance and retribution would be had. In Hawaiian mo'olelo, 'Io was a teacher, a judge, and compared to the highest of chiefs. Other than Emily Ahuena Taylor's article, "The Cult of Iolani," there is no evidence or documentation of 'Io as a Supreme Being in the archive of Hawaiian knowledge; rather, the concept was probably introduced by Māori and influenced by Christianity in certain areas of New Zealand.



## References

- Akana, K. (1991). Corrective justice in Hawaiian literature. In *SPICE V: Center for Law-Related Education*, Wake Forest University, NC.
- Argue, B. (n.d.). Hawaiian hawk. *Mybirdingjourney*. Retrieved: <https://www.mybirdingjourney.com/hawaiian-hawk-io/>
- Beckwith, M. (1940). *Hawaiian mythology*. New Haven.
- Emory, K. (1942). The Hawaiian God 'Io. *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 50: 200-201.
- Fornander, A. (1916). Thrum, T. (Ed.). *Fornander Collection of Hawaiian Antiquities and Folk-Lore, Volume 4*. Bernice P. Bishop Museum.
- Fornander, A. (1918). Thrum, T. (Ed.). *Fornander Collection of Hawaiian Antiquities and Folk-Lore, Volume 5*. Bernice P. Bishop Museum. <http://www.archive.org/details/FornanderCollection5>
- Handy, E. S. C. (1941). "The Hawaiian cult of Io". *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*. Wellington: *The Polynesian Society*. 50 (199): 134–159. OCLC 6015277417.
- Kalākaua, D., & Daggett, M. (1888). *Legends and myths of Hawaii: The fables and folklore of a strange people*. New York: C. L. Webster.
- Kepelino, Z. (1859). The native birds of Hawaii. *Hai Manawa*, p. 265.
- Kruger, M. (2010). *The naughty 'elepaio*. Hilo, HI: Hale Kuamo'o.
- Malo, D. (1951). *Hawaiian antiquities*. (Emerson, N.B., Trans). Honolulu, HI: Bishop Museum.
- Mitchell, D. D. K. (1992). *Resource units in Hawaiian culture*. Kamehameha Schools.
- Peale, T. R. (1848). *Mamalia and ornithology. U.S. Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842, 3, Philadelphia*.
- [Photograph of Dr. Donald Kilohana Mitchell]. (1968, Oct. 9). *Star Advertiser Archive*.
- Puku'i, M. K., & Elbert, S. H. (1986). *Hawaiian dictionary: Hawaiian-English, English-Hawaiian*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Puku'i, M. K., & Curtis, C. (1985). The naughty 'elepaio. *Tales of the Menehune*. Kamehameha Schools Press.
- Puku'i, M. K. (1983). *'Ōlelo no'eau: Hawaiian proverbs and poetical sayings*. Honolulu, HI: Bishop Museum Press.
- Simpson, J. (1997, August). Io as supreme being: Intellectual colonization of the Māori? *History of Religions*, 37:1, 50-85.
- Tanner, T. (2004, Oct. 31). Hula on an island, but Hawaii it's not. *New York Times*.
- Taylor, E. A. (1931). The cult of Iolani. *Paradise of the Pacific*
- VanderWerf, E. (2019, Apr. 16). Oahu Elepaio. Macaulay Library. Retrieved: [https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/151993751#\\_ga=2.243195265.2052932688.16601592921614905194.1658947374](https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/151993751#_ga=2.243195265.2052932688.16601592921614905194.1658947374)
- Westervelt, W. D. (1915). *Hawaiian legends of Honolulu*. Boston: G.H. Ellis Press.
- Wilson, Scott B., and Evans, A. N., (1890-1899). *Aves Hawaiienses: The Birds of the Sandwich Islands*, London.

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Other types of justice: distributive (determining who gets what), procedural (determining how fairly people are treated), and restorative (which tries to restore relationships to "rightness").
- <sup>2</sup> Only the 1903 version contains this passage. Subsequent editions do not.
- <sup>3</sup> Kamehameha II or Liholiho 'Iolani
- <sup>4</sup> Kamehameha IV or Alexander 'Iolani, later anglicized to Alexander Liholiho