

Attention - Oahu Arborists

Help Protect the Official Bird of Honolulu!

Attachment IV - White Tern
Arborist Fact Sheet



Look, Listen and Locate trees with nesting White terns.

Do Not trim branches or remove trees with nesting White terns.

Leave a nesting tree or branch alone for at least 80 days from when the egg is laid.



Interesting Facts

- White terns are found in urban Honolulu, especially in urban parks and residential areas from Hawaii Kai to Hickam Air Force Base. Nests may be found in other areas as well.
- The White tern is also known as manu o Ku (the Hawaiian God Ku's bird).
- White terns are indigenous to Hawaii and lay a single egg directly on a ledge, tree branch, or other suitable location.
- White terns can lay eggs anytime of the year, but most are laid from January through June.
- A white tern egg will hatch after about 35 days of incubation. From the day an egg is laid it takes approximately 80 days for the chick to be mature enough to leave the nest on its own.

The Law

- Any action resulting in the killing or moving of a egg and/or chick, and the killing of an adult is prohibited under state and federal law.
- Moving a chick to another branch is also a violation of state and federal law because it will result in abandonment of the chick by its parents.
- Under Hawaii State law, the penalty for a first violation is a fine of not less than \$250.00, imprisonment or both. In addition, the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) may impose an administrative fine of up to \$5,000.00 per specimen.
- Under the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, penalties can range from \$150 up to \$15,000 and may include imprisonment, depending upon circumstances.

What can I do?

- Arborists trimming trees containing white tern chicks or eggs are advised to contact the Hawaii Division of Forestry and Wildlife before proceeding with trimming or felling.
- Examine tree limbs with binoculars and ask someone within the vicinity if they have seen or heard any birds in the area prior to the commencement of tree trimming.
- Typical signs of a white tern nest include "whitewash" (pure white, odorless droppings) or white feathers on the ground directly beneath the nest.
- White terns may fly nearby and utter raspy calls when courting or when they perceive their chick to be in danger.
- If a chick is found on the ground beneath its branch, then the only hope for the chick to survive without additional human intervention is if the chick can be quickly placed back EXACTLY on the spot of the same branch from where it fell (i.e. where it was hatched).
- If you would like to report human activity that may be threatening an active white tern nest please call the DLNR Division of Conservation and Resource Enforcement 24 hour hotline at (808) 643-DLNR or the Office of Law Enforcement of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at (808) 861-8525.

