



PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: **Christy Martin**, Public Information Officer
CGAPS—Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species & the ISCs—Invasive Species
Committees of Hawaii
Ph: (808) 722-0995
Email: christym@rocketmail.com

Big Island Residents Urged to Report Bulbul Sightings

Three recent sightings of bulbuls near Hilo and on the Kona coast have agriculture and wildlife officials concerned that this invasive alien bird may be establishing a population on the Big Island. It is thought that all of the sightings are of red-vented bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*), which are native to Pakistan, India and surrounding area.

Red-vented bulbuls were introduced to Oahu in the mid-1950s as an unauthorized cage release. Since then, the bulbul population on Oahu has gone from just a handful of birds to being one of the most common species on the island. However, it is not known to be present on any of the neighbor islands.

Bulbuls are a serious agricultural pest. They feed on fruits like bananas and papayas, flower nectar, insects, and they have also been known to eat orchid buds.

The spread of this bird on several Pacific islands also coincides with the rapid spread of several species of invasive plants, in such as lantana, prickly solanum (*Solanum torvum*) and Cape gooseberry (*Physalis angulata*) in Fiji, *Miconia calvescens* in Tahiti, ivy gourd (*Coccinia grandis*) and fiddlewood (*Cytherexylum* spp.) on Oahu.

Since bulbuls are larger than other seed-dispersing birds already present on the Big Island, there is a high degree of concern that they will facilitate a great ‘leap’ in the distribution of weeds with larger seeds.

The most recent sighting was of a pair of birds at Onekahakaha State Park. Signs have been posted in the area and Big Island residents have been asked to report sightings directly to the Hawaii Department of Agriculture in Hilo at 974-4221.

Last September bulbuls were sighted twice around the Mauna Lani Resort north of Kona. Both reports were made by members of the Birding Hawaii group in September 2003. The birds were identified both by their calls and visually. Surveys of the area by wildlife officials did not locate the birds.

Bulbuls are on the State Injurious Species list, which makes it illegal to release or transport them to other parts of the state or to export them without a permit.

Please be on the lookout for this pest! Red-vented bulbuls have a pointed crest on their head similar to a cardinal. The crest feathers, head, eyes, legs and beak are black to dark grey, but they have bright red feathers under their tail on their rump. Bulbuls are often seen scavenging in parks, hunting for insects in the evening hours, sitting on telephone wires, and are one of the few birds that tend to land on the sides of trees.

Sightings of bulbuls outside of Oahu should be reported immediately to the State Pest Hotline at (808) 586-PEST.

For more information on bulbuls in Hawaii, visit
<http://www.botany.hawaii.edu/bot350/1996/Cherie/cherie2.htm>

For photos of red-vented bulbuls, visit
http://www.botany.hawaii.edu/biology101/lab/Lab01/birds/red_vented_bulbul.htm

Christy Martin is the Public Information Officer for the statewide Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS) and the Invasive Species Committees of Hawaii (ISCs), statewide and island-based partnerships working to protect Hawaii from invasive species.

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