

## Haleakalā National Park: *A Ranger's Perspective*

**J**ourneying from the coral reefs off Kīpahulu, up the valleys, through the clouds, past forests of giant koa, and into the realm of silverswords and gods, one cannot truly remain unchanged. The fact that it is possible to go to a place of such diversity steeped in tradition and legend is remarkable. The fact that it can be experienced in a single day is almost astounding.

Everything at Haleakalā came from far away and changed as a result of making the journey to the “house of the sun.” The very rocks that created the island transmuted from deep mantle proto-rock to fiery lava and red cinders. Most rock in the world is far more provincial and less traveled; being derivations of surface material. Haleakalā lava rocks built a 10,023 foot mass so large it bends the crust beneath it. Because of its bulk in the middle of a vast ocean, Haleakalā provides most every kind of habitat found on earth in one small place; deserts, rainforest, tundra, streams, bogs, wet, dry, cold, and hot.

Canoes fashioned in distant lands brought the first peoples to these remote islands. They began their trips as Polynesians, but in time the land and the unique life on the new islands transformed the culture – and they became Hawaiians. The abundance of life on Haleakalā in all its myriad forms was the raw material of culture. Eventually, nature and culture were inseparable. So much so that today when the park practices natural resource protection and preservation it is helping to maintain, perpetuate, and reconnect Hawaiians with their culture.

For example, some of the rocks at the summit of Haleakalā crystallized into fine-grained dark stone prized by the adze makers of old Hawaii for their strength. Pilgrims from the coast would brave the journey up to the realm of the gods to quarry these special rocks for tools. Others clad in capes of Ti leaves would brave the night to transform

themselves into kilo hōkū (star gazers-navigators).

A landscape that is both remote and high are key factors to the unique species that would eventually inhabit the islands. Anything that survived the long journey to Hawaii had many ecological niches to choose from when it arrived. Thus birds flourished and specialized into different varieties. Many ecological niches occupied by mammals on a continent became the domain of birds in Hawaii.



Instead of herds of grazing ungulates, geese inhabited the grasslands of Maui. Plants, insects, and birds adapted to each other in an evolutionary dance that only time can count.

More recently, the degree of change at Haleakalā National Park has become a concern to scientists, park managers, and visitors. Introduced species and pests are crowding out native species, and new diseases arrive and decimate populations of people and animals.

Before people arrived, a species naturally took hold in Hawaii once every 30,000 years or so. Now with modern air travel countless new species arrive to Maui every week as seeds on clothing, insects on imported plants, or bacteria on new fruits. Perhaps this is the most profound paradox of all. By making the journey to see this special place, we are both changed by what we see, and are changing the landscape at the same time.

The hope for the future is that visiting Haleakalā National Park is so life changing that visitors and residents alike are compelled to act on behalf of the land. Just as Haleakalā has changed throughout millennia, we hope that visiting a National Park is a transformative event for every individual who comes to experience it.

–D. Cardea



"In an attempt to understand the interwoven nature of the ecosystems on Haleakalā, scientists are returning to the nineteenth century traditions of the naturalist. They catalog and explore the island, mapping and noting locations of plants and animals. Technology such as Geographic Information Systems adds a modern twist to the hand drawn maps of old. The result is a beautiful mosaic of colors and shapes that belong in a museum of art as much as they do in a laboratory."

–D. Cardea, Ranger

