

MidWeek

Operation Naupaka Keeps Baby Birds Behind Danger Line

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By Carol Chang



Danny Bishop surveys the busy workers from his truck at the naupaka planting day for Waihee Marsh Makai. Visible are (from left) Rich Vermeesch, Amy Luerson and Jessica Wooley. Photo by Ken LeVasseur.

Cars whiz by it every day in Kahaluu, researchers built their thesis on it, and bird lovers cry in delight and dismay. It's the Waihee Marsh Makai.

Nestled between the canoe club halau and Sunshine Arts Gallery on Kamehameha Highway, the wetland bird habitat got a helping hand Feb. 16 from Kahaluu Neighborhood Board members, residents and KEY Project folks who said "Let's do it!" and worked together to put a naupaka hedge between wandering baby birds and the busy, two-lane highway.

"It was a good day, a hot clear day," said board member Rich Vermeesch. "It was good to get together and put a hand to something that's good that everyone could agree

to."

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Overall, the enthusiastic crew planted 400-plus naupaka plants 30 inches apart along the 1,250-foot highway frontage that day. Local landscaper Greg Boyer donated the cuttings, Ken LeVasseur designed the project, Rick Towill lent his backhoe, Jonathan Brewer operated it, Waiahole farmer Danny Bishop trucked in the mulch and fertilizer, and Brennon Morioka and the state Department of Transportation issued the permit for work on the city-owned parcel. Then everyone else showed up with shovels and hoes and got down to business.

Operation Naupaka began after Robert Capella spoke to the neighborhood board about the hazards spawned by the thriving new native bird habitat. The hatchlings were trotting into traffic and getting creamed. (The area was once a tangle of man-grove and hau trees that hid its potential as a refuge for coots, stilts, egrets and more.)

Volunteers hope the barrier hedge will stop the march of feathered keiki. After all, Vermeesch said, "Naupaka is a good, low-maintenance plant: It just sits there and does what it's told. Hopefully, as it grows and takes hold, it will keep the birds off the road. But even if it doesn't, it will still be a nice addition."

LeVasseur already is looking forward to phase two and three. "I'm very stoked," he said. "Next we'll resurface that mound, cover and plant it and put up a display board about the plants and the trees. Then maybe we can install a pullout for buses and cars. When people see the waterbirds there, you see the cameras come out."

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