



WETLAND KŌKUA

MĀKĀLEI – THE LEGEND OF KAHINIHINI'ULA

A long, long time ago, Kailua used to look very different. This was before Times supermarket or Pali Highway were built. There was no shave ice store or *musubi* at Kalapawai Market.

This was a time when Kailua Bay was so big, that Kawai Nui Marsh came up to meet it. Back then, Kawai Nui was not just a marsh, it was a very big fishpond (*loko pu'uone*) and a big wetland where many water plants, birds and fish lived. Kawai Nui went so far *mauka* that it was hard for the fish to tell when they left the mountain streams and when they swam into Kawai Nui!

It was only when they could see or hear so many *'alae'ula*, our red-headed mudhen, and *āe'o*, the Hawaiian stilt with the very long legs, that the fish knew they had entered Kawai Nui. Then the fish would certainly know they had reached their destination, because they could hear the chirp-chirp of the little chicks in the nests, where the birds had made their homes.



Many years ago, there were many farmers growing *kalo* in the *lo'i* (taro patches) high up in Maunawili Valley, all the way down to the edge of Kawai Nui. Hawaiians loved this *kalo*, because it made the most delicious *poi*. And it wasn't just the people that loved the *kalo*, the fish loved the *kalo* too! There were so many delicious foods in the waters of the *lo'i* – just like dessert! As the water from the *lo'i* flowed into the fishpond, the fish would eat and grow fat and happy.



There were so many fish! It looked like more fish than stars in the sky! No one could count all the fish, not even you.

Many years passed, the fish and the birds were happy, even the farmers, the streams and the *'āina*. But after a while things began to change.

The fishpond keepers were not doing their duties and Kawai Nui became thick with *limu* (algae). Around that time, a new *konohiki* (ruler) came to Kailua. He saw that Kawai Nui pond had become overgrown, and the fish would hide in the *limu*. Whenever the fisherman would fish in the pond, they couldn't see the fish!



So the *konohiki* asked all the people of Kailua to *kōkua*, come help clean the pond. Men, women and children came to help, and among them was a little boy named Kahinihini'ula – the little red-haired boy. Kahinihini'ula lived with his *tūtū wahine* (grandmother) deep in Maunawili Valley in the area called Makawao. His *tūtū wahine* was too old, so he came alone to help in the pond.

For three days the people of Kailua helped clean Kawai Nui pond. At the end of each day, the *konohiki* would have a big *pā'ina* (party) of *poi* and roasted pig and fish to thank the people for their hard work. And that wasn't all. Each man, woman and child, was given a gift of four fish to take home to their *kūpuna* who were too old to work in the ponds.

Everyone was very happy, except Kahinihini'ula. He was so little that he was ignored, and the fishpond keepers didn't give him any fish for his *tūtū wahine*. So he went home empty-handed, tired after a long day of work.



His *tūtū* was not very pleased when she found out that the *konohiki* had not given Kahinihini'ula any fish. What a shame that the *konohiki* ignored the little boy! She told her *mo'opuna* (grandchild) not to go back the next day, but he did. And for the next two days, Kahinihini'ula worked all day, and still the fishpond keepers gave him no fish!

His *tūtū wahine* was angry! How could the *konohiki* allow his fishpond keepers to be so *lōlō*, so unfair? If someone, no matter how little, gives their *kōkua*, they must be appreciated. If there are plenty of fish, they must always be shared so that no one goes hungry!

So in the morning, Kahinihini'ula's *tūtū wahine* gave him a special branch—a *mākālei* tree branch that belonged to her family from long, long ago. The branch was a gift from her ancestor Haumea, mother of the 'āina, mother of all living things.

With this branch, *tūtū wahine* told Kahinihini'ula to go to the pond and show the fish the *mākālei* branch. He did as he was told, and the fish knew that it was Haumea's magic branch.





The fish formed a long thick line, and they followed Kahinihini'ula and his *mākālei* branch. He walked around the pond along the stream, up the valley to his home. As Kahinihini'ula walked from Kawai Nui to Maunawili, all the fish followed him. Soon the pond at Kawai Nui was empty and all the fish were in the pond just outside Kahinihini'ula's *hale* (home)!

It didn't take long for the fishpond keepers to see that fish had left the pond! When the *konohiki* found out, he knew that a great wrong had been done. The ancestors (gods) were unhappy at how they had treated Kahinihini'ula. It was wrong not to share the fish with everyone, especially those that had helped.

So the *konohiki* went to Maunawili to find Kahinihini'ula and his *tūtū wahine*. He apologized for their terrible mistake, and Kahinihini'ula forgave him. The fish returned to the pond. From then on, the *konohiki* was sure to instruct his fishpond keepers to always be fair and share the fish from his pond.

Discussion Questions

- Where does this story take place?
- What is a *lo'i*? Why do the fish like it?
- Why did the *konohiki* call all the people of Kailua?
- Who is the young boy in the story? Where does he live?
- Why was his *tūtū wahine* so angry?
- What did his *tūtū wahine* give him? Where did it come from?
- What did she ask him to do?
- What did the *konohiki* and his fishpond keepers do that was so wrong?
- What is the lesson that the *konohiki* learned?

(Source: Kawai Nui Heritage Foundation. 1985. *Kawainui Marsh: A Child's Heritage. A Native Hawaiian Library Project*. Alu Like, Inc. Honolulu, HI. Original story authored by Samuel Kaiākea Keko'owai, as published in the Hawaiian language newspaper *Kū'oko'a*, January 26, 1922. Translated by Kihei de Silva.)

