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Kaua'i County Council - February 9, 2022 Testimony RE: Bill 2842

Aloha distinguished members of the Kaua'i County Council. My name is Thomas Daubert. Mahalo nui loa for this opportunity to speak with you today and express my support for Bill #2842. I am here today both as a concerned citizen and in my capacity as Executive Director of the Friends of Kaua'i Wildlife Refuges. For over 38 years, our organization has served as the nonprofit Friends Group that supports the environmental and wildlife conservation, historic preservation and community education programs of the Kaua'i National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and includes Kīlauea Point, Hanalei and Hulē'ia National Wildlife Refuges.

Within these precious federally-protected lands, my colleagues work tirelessly to protect, preserve, support, study and advocate for the threatened, endangered and special listed native Hawaiian birds that need our kokua. Across the Island of Kaua'i and within these Refuges, feral cats remain a constant threat to the seabirds and wetland birds that evolved within this beautiful island ecosystem without defenses against mammalian predators.

Through my work, I have personally seen footage of feral cats killing native birds at Hanalei NWR – a space that is, by design, meant to be a haven of safety for threatened and endangered wildlife. And it is truly heartbreaking to see a defenseless chick taken right out of its nest by a feral cat. In many of these instances, the feral cat has traveled downhill from Princeville, where it was likely fed by community members and possibly even released after being spayed or neutered.

Through bird surveys I've conducted on Hanalei NWR, I have also had the unhappy experience of identifying the predated remains of birds, where the tell-tale signs of cat fur in the bird's claws and wings document its last struggle to survive.

Between 2014 and 2018, feral cats killed over 251 endemic birds at Hanalei National Wildlife Refuge alone. Included within this shocking statistic is the predation of 100 Hawaiian gallinules (or moorhens), those beautiful little black birds with the bright red bill and forehead seen around wetlands across the island. There are now fewer than 1,000

individual Hawaiian gallinules left in our entire world and they need us to work together to help protect them. ...Protect them, for example, from the 41 feral cats that were removed from Hanalei and Kīlauea Point NWRs alone, between December of 2020 and May of 2021.

Feral cats are also known to kill Red-tailed tropicbirds around the Nihokū portion of Kīlauea Point, Wedge-tailed shearwaters in nesting colonies across the island and the critically endangered Newell's shearwaters within their burrows high up in the mountains of Kaua'i – to cite just a few more examples of the impact of allowing these invasive predators to roam and feed on the wildlife of our island.

And, sadly, we lost 12 Laysan albatross chicks to cat predation just last week alone from nesting sites across the North Shore.

Feral cats can live for up to 15 years preying upon native birds, even while being fed by well-meaning community members. It has been observed that a feral cat with a belly full of pet food will still hunt, kill and eat the birds we are working so hard to protect. Because hunting is an instinctual behavior for cats, feeding them and supporting feral cat colonies does not keep them from preying upon our native wildlife. In fact, it only makes these predators stronger and, if they have not been spayed or neutered, feeding them can also increase their breeding success, which further perpetuates this disastrous lifecycle.

I strongly believe that feral cats living freely across our island is inconsistent with the delicate balance of our island ecosystem. Cats were introduced by humans, and I believe that it is our job, as stewards of this place, to work together to reduce the population of feral cats across our island and to create and maintain safe nesting and foraging grounds for the native Hawaiian birds that inhabited these islands long before humans arrived.

So today, I ask for your help, and I respectfully request that Kaua'i County Councilmembers vote in support of Bill #2842, which will work to help reduce feral cat populations. This bill is just one of the many important and critical steps that we need to take to help reduce the incidence of these terrible experiences and help us make our refuges, and our entire island, safer for native Hawaiian birds.

On behalf of our wildlife conservation partners, public health advocates and the concerned community members who care deeply about the health and vitality of our delicate island ecosystem, mahalo nui loa! We deeply appreciate all that you do to support the Island of Kaua'i and the wildlife that we share it with – and for this opportunity to present testimony.