



Seeking the Sacred Raven: Politics and Extinction on a Hawaiian Island

Mark Jerome Walters

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Will the 'Alala ever return to the wild? A bird sacred to Hawaiians and a member of the raven family, the 'Alala today survives only in captivity. How the species once flourished, how it has been driven to near-extinction, and how people struggled to save it, is the gripping story of *Seeking the Sacred Raven*.

For years, author Mark Jerome Walters has tracked the sacred bird's role in Hawaiian culture and the indomitable 'Alala's sad decline. Trekking through Hawaii's rain forests high on Mauna Loa, talking with biologists, landowners, and government officials, he has woven an epic tale of missed opportunities and the best intentions gone awry. A species that once numbered in the thousands is now limited to about 50 captive birds.

Seeking the Sacred Raven is as much about people and culture as it is about failed policies. From the ancient Polynesians who first settled the island, to Captain Cook in the 18th century, to would-be saviors of the 'Alala in the 1990s, individuals with conflicting passions and priorities have shaped Hawaii and the fate of this dwindling cloud-forest species.

Walters captures brilliantly the internecine politics among private landowners, scientists, environmental groups, individuals and government agencies battling over the bird's habitat and protection. It's only one species, only one bird, but *Seeking the Sacred Raven* illustrates vividly the many dimensions of species loss, for the human as well as non-human world.

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