

Story: Sometimes It's Simple; Sometimes It's Not

April 28, 2024

Acts 8:26-40

1 John 4:7-21

The i'iwi eats nectar. Human beings tend to complain about a diet that is mostly liquid, but we might complain less if it was mostly nectar. I'iwi don't complain about it. Their long curved bill works really well for getting nectar from flowers that other birds like the 'apapane can't reach.

I'iwi have a neat trick for feeding from some flowers which open down. One will hang below the flower and poke its beak up into the nectar reservoir. There are other birds on the island that do this, but the i'iwi do it most often.

One young i'iwi came to believe that, because this was a hard-won skill, she had to use it all the time. On every flower. Whether they opened downward or upward.

Believe it or not, it sort of worked. It worked very well on those downward flowers, of course. That's why i'iwi developed that technique.

It worked on sideways facing flowers, though it was more of a strain to get her neck into the right position. She kept at it, though. If she was going to do something, she'd do it right. And as with many things, constant practice meant that she did, indeed, get better and better.

It was more of a struggle, though, with flowers that opened upward. A lot of ohi'a blossoms, for example, open upward, and i'iwi sip a lot of ohi'a nectar. Still, ohi'a is a pretty open flower, without a lot of petals to get in the way. She managed.

Then there were the flowers with upward petals and, well, those didn't go well at all.

Her mother came for a visit one day as she was flitting about from tree to tree. She didn't say anything when she hung upside down for downward facing flowers. She didn't say anything when she reached up for sideways flowers. She opened her beak but didn't say anything about the ohi'a flowers she sipped from beneath.

But when she tried to get at a big hibiscus blossom from underneath, she said, "What are you doing?"

"I'm eating," said her daughter.

“No you’re not. You can’t get at the nectar in that flower from down there.”

“Sure I can. It’s just a matter of technique.”

Mother watched daughter struggle to get her curved beak around the petals and to the nectar at the flower’s center. Eventually the younger bird, with a glance at her mother, perched just above and to the side and took a good long sip.

“You don’t always need to come at things from underneath,” said mother.

“Isn’t that the i’iwi way?” asked her daughter.

“The i’iwi way is to fly, eat, deal with the neighbors, get a good sleep each night, and be the most stylish birds on the mountain,” said her mother. “Nothing says you have to do something the hard way all the time.

“Sometimes things are simple. Sometimes they’re not. Doing simple things in a complicated way doesn’t get you fed, or flying, or sleeping. Doing complicated things in a simple way doesn’t get any of those things done either.

“When it’s simple, do it simply, daughter. Save the complicated techniques for when it’s hard.”

by Eric Anderson