

Story: Not So Cool

January 11, 2026

Isaiah 42:1-9

Matthew 3:13-17

‘Auku’u are cool birds. They’re the most widespread heron in the world. Our Hawaiian ‘auku’u have relatives across all the continents, including Antarctica. They’ve got startling orange eyes when they’re young and even more startling red eyes when they get older. Their blue and gray feathering is very smart, and who can forget those long black and white feathers trailing back from the head. They’re cool birds.

One of them knew it.

Like most ‘auku’u, he spent a good deal of his perching time settling his feathers. They all do that; it’s kind of like the way you and I wash our hands pretty often. Since he knew he was a really cool bird, though, and wanted to make sure everybody else knew it, he spent a lot more time, twice as much time as the other ‘auku’u.

Which is OK, I guess, if you’re a cool bird and want to make sure you stay a cool bird. The problem was, he decided that since he was a cool bird he would also be the best fed bird.

‘Auku’u do tend to warn other birds away when they’re feeding, but he took it to another level. If he saw a bird land nearby, he’d squawk and screech. If it flew away, he’d squawk until it was out of sight. If it landed, he’d take off and fly right at it, screeching until it took to the air again.

He squawked at other ‘auku’u. He squawked at ae’o. He squawked at ale’e ke’oke’o. He squawked at cattle egrets and kolea and akekeke. All in all, he screeched at everyone.

Then he’d settle back down, settle his feathers, and turn his attention to fishing once more – except that by this time another bird would usually settle nearby and he’d be screeching again.

Not too far away, some other ‘auku’u watched all this with some puzzlement.

“What good is all that doing him?” asked one of the other.

“Is he eating any better?” asked the second of the first.

“I don’t think so,” she answered. “Does he look any better to you?”

“Not to me,” her friend said. “He mostly looks unhappy.”

“With all that preening,” said the first ‘auku’u, “he should look more stylish than that.”

"You know, I hate to say it," said the second 'auku'u, "he doesn't look cool."

"Not cool at all," said his friend.

"It's a pity," said the second, "that a cool bird looks so uncool."

The screeching started again from across the pond, and the two birds shrugged, settled some of their own feathers, and turned back to fishing.

by Eric Anderson