

Story: Settle Down, 'Amakihi

August 16, 2026

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

Matthew 15:21-28

'Amakihi aren't the most social birds in the world. We're used to seeing the flocks of myna around Hilo, and we're used to seeing saffron finches in pairs. I've never seen more than one 'amakihi at a time, which I grant you isn't all that useful as information, because there could be six of them near me and if five of them are on the other side of some trees, I won't see them. And probably haven't.

That said, 'amakihi do participate in mixed flocks of birds over the summer, and they are pretty mellow about other birds getting near their nests – but that is the time when they're the most anxious and the most aggressive. When they've got eggs or young in the nests, they're not very happy to have other birds about. Parents can be protective like that.

One first-time father was particularly eager to see that his eggs and then his hatchlings and then his fledglings stayed safe. He warned other 'amakihi away from the nest, and he chased mejiro and 'apapane. He even dared to chase i'iwi away, which is kind of unusual in the mountain forest. I'iwi are far more accustomed to chasing 'amakihi than being chased, but fortunately the i'iwi was more amused than angered by it all. Besides, eggs are important, and so he kept a respectful distance after that.

The 'amakihi kept it up as the youngsters learned to fly. It didn't take all that long before they were flying with him and their mother about the forest. In a short time they had flown off for themselves, joining with some other young 'amakihi and 'apapane in the forest.

That's when most 'amakihi stop aggressively defending their nests. For whatever reason, he didn't. Or rather, he did: he kept chasing birds away from a nest without eggs or young or anything. His wife was confused, and told him so. "I'm keeping the nest safe," he said.

"Keeping it safe from what?" she asked.

"From everyone!" he said.

"Why? There's nothing in it but sticks and grass," she said.

"It's got to be safe!" he said, and nothing she said changed her mind.

Nothing his auntie said changed his mind, either. He was so anxious and afraid. Nothing his tutu said – and you know he was wound up if he wouldn't listen to Tutu.

It was the i'iwi that got through to him. That same i'iwi he'd chased away months before fluttered over to perch just far enough to prevent a quick rush by the nervous 'amakihi, who was fluffing up his feathers and getting ready to chase him anyway.

"Settle down, 'amakihi," said the i'iwi. "I'm staying away from your nest. But I'm confused. Why are you still protecting it so fiercely?"

"Nests are for protecting!" said the 'amakihi, "especially from strange birds."

"Nests are for protecting?" asked the i'iwi. "I thought eggs and chicks were for protecting. Was I wrong about that?"

"Eggs and chicks..." repeated the 'amakihi, and suddenly the light flashed in his head. He looked at the empty nest, which would fall to pieces before it was time for eggs and chicks again, and then looked back at the i'iwi.

"You're right," he said. "I've been foolish."

"That's all right, 'amakihi," said the i'iwi. "You can recover from foolishness. If you'd like, you can come fly with this flock I've found for the summer. There's some birds who can spot nectar a mile away."

The two birds flew off together.

by Eric Anderson