

# Native plant presumed extinct; found at Parker Ranch | Hawaii247.com

Clermontia (Photo courtesy The Nature Conservancy)



## MEDIA RELEASE

A Hawaiian plant species that had not been seen in a century and which was



presumed extinct has been discovered on Parker Ranch lands in the Kohala region.

Staff from The Nature Conservancy made the discovery earlier this summer in an upland rainforest on the slopes of Kohala volcano.

“We were surveying a rare tree snail population when we came across a native lobelia plant that we were unable to identify,” said Jon Giffin, the Conservancy’s Hawaii Island field representative.

The lobelia (Clermontia) was growing on ohia and hapuu. It had greenish white flowers and leaves that were dark green on the upper surface with a reddish midrib. The undersides were a dull green.

Photographs of the plant were sent to Dr. Thomas Lammers, a recognized Clermontia authority at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, who identified it as Clermontia peleiana ssp. singuliflora.

“*C. peleana singuliflora* was last seen on the Island of Hawaii in 1909 and last collected on East Maui in 1920,” Giffin said. “It was presumed extinct prior to the rediscovery.”

When informed of the find, Brandi Beaudet, land manager for Parker Ranch, Inc., gave the Conservancy permission to search for other individuals and to collect seeds for propagation.

“Parker Ranch, Inc. believes in and supports good land stewardship. We all agreed that the discovery of this native plant was an important one and that we should propagate the plant and develop a strategy to protect it,” Beaudet said.

*C.peleana singuliflora* is one of two subspecies of *Clermontia peleana* (Hawaiian: oha wai), an epiphytic shrub or tree. The name commemorates Pele, the volcano goddess of Hawaiian mythology.

Until now, *C. peleana singuliflora* has never been reported from the Kohala region. Over 30 individual plants have been found, many of which were flowering and fruiting. Seeds from seven different plants have been taken to the Volcano Rare Plant Facility for propagation.

“It will be another two or three months before we know if they germinate,” Giffin said. “But we plan to collect more seeds in the future.”

Giffin said the discovery is an outgrowth of the Kohala Watershed Partnership, of which Parker Ranch, Inc. is a founding member. Formed in 2003, the partnership consists of 11 public and private landowners who are working to protect the water resources and watershed functions of the Kohala Mountains. As a non-landowner, The Nature Conservancy is an associate partner.

Prior to the discovery, Parker Ranch, Inc. had given the Conservancy permission to begin tree snail conservation work on its 400-acre Kaneaa parcel, where the *C. peleana singuliflora* was found. That parcel and an adjacent parcel owned by Ponoholo Ranch (another founding member of the Kohala Watershed Partnership) support the world’s only known population of the Pupu kani oe (*Partulina physa*) tree snail.

According to Beaudet, Parker Ranch, Inc. had been unable to use the Kaneaa parcel for years because it was remote and isolated and populated by wild cattle.

“One of the goals of the partnership was to remove the wild cattle and reclaim the land,” Beaudet said.

That was accomplished in 2009, when the area was fenced and all wild cattle removed.

The Kohala Watershed Partnership played a major role in obtaining funds for the project, constructing the exclosure fence and removing the cattle.

Dr. Sam Gon, senior scientist and cultural advisor for The Nature Conservancy of Hawaii, called news of the find heartening but not surprising.

“In a place like Hawaii, with its rich native diversity, rugged terrain and remote places, there is always the potential for new and exciting discoveries,” he said.

