



Halau Mele, Hawaii, May 2010

### [Lecture: Samuel M. 'Ohukani'ōhi'a Gon III - The Natural World of the Hula](#)

Hula is far more than a dance form from Hawai'i. It is an expression of the relationship of Hawaiians to the natural elements of islands and to each other. In turn, the natural world is the source and foundation for the hula art form. NMAI visitors celebrated Hawaiian culture with Dr. Sam Gon as he explored not only the symbology of the ornamentation and Hawaiian musical instruments inherent in hula, but the spiritual underpinnings of the ecosystems and plants of land and sea, and how they shaped the undeniably Hawaiian dance called hula.

Samuel M. 'Ohukani'ōhi'a Gon III, senior scientist and cultural advisor for the Hawai'i Nature Conservancy, has 30 years of experience in Hawaiian ecology, as well as extensive knowledge of Hawaiian culture, history and language. A well-known cultural practitioner of traditional chant and protocol, he underwent the traditional Hawaiian 'uniki rites of passage under Kumu John Keolamaka'ainana Lake to attain the status of Kahuna Kākalaleo. Gon also holds a master's degree in zoology and a doctorate in animal behavior from the University of California-Davis.

The lecture was held at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, May 29 & 30, 2010

Tim Johnson, Associate Director for Museum Programs, *U.S. National Museum of the American Indian*:

"the lecture given by Dr. Samuel M. 'Ohunkani'ōhi'a Gon III, was nothing short of exceptional. It was Indigenous Geography at its best — an amazing display of Native knowledge (including the use of Hawaiian language and chants), scientific scholarship, and traditional storytelling. Anyone who was fortunate enough to attend his presentation gained a solid foundation and appreciation for what Hawaiian culture is really all about."

An archive video of this program is located at:  
<http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/7308502>.



**Dr. Samuel M. 'Ohukani'ōhi'a Gon, III**  
**Senior Scientist and Cultural Advisor**  
The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i

Part of the Conservancy staff for over 24 years, Sam has brought his expertise to the organization in a variety of capacities. As the Ecologist for the Hawai'i Natural Heritage Program of [The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i](#) from 1986 - 1999, he conducted biological inventories and produced biological reports and management recommendations for The Conservancy, our partner federal, state, and local agencies, and for private organizations. As the coordinator for the Hawai'i Natural Heritage Program from 1992 to 1994, Sam managed a staff of 15 and an annual budget of over \$1 million. As Director of Science he guided the science behind the vision and operations of The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i. In his current role as Senior Scientist and Cultural Advisor, Sam maintains his science guidance, and adds his cultural expertise to enhance the mission of The Conservancy.

Sam has over 30 years of experience in Hawaiian ecology. This experience includes biological inventories and research, field ecology, entomology, archeology, ethology, natural community classification, ecological modeling, and biological database management. He also is versed in Hawaiian culture, history, and language. Sam is instrumental in many facets of the Conservancy's work. His knowledge of Hawaiian culture and history are an important asset when working with local communities. He has applied his island conservation expertise in cooperative projects and workshops in the Galapagos Islands, the Philippines, Pohnpei, Palau, Jamaica, Okinawa, Amazonia, and Rapanui. As an excellent public speaker, Sam often lends his knowledge to conservation agencies, educational institutions, community groups, donors, and important visitors.

Sam is an active member of The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i and an Advisory Committee member for the 'Ōhi'a Project (Hawaiian natural history curriculum development). Additionally, he serves as a Hawaiian natural history and culture consultant for the Moanalua Gardens Foundation (and its evolving status in the [Papahāna Kūāōla Hawaiian Education Center](#)), sits on the steering committee of the ['Ahahui Mālama i ka Lōkahi](#) (Hawaiians for the preservation of native ecosystems), and on the Restoration Advisory Group for the Kaho'olawe Island Reserve Commission. He has served on panels of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs on the topic of traditional management of natural resources, and sits on the Hawaiian leadership committee advising the Hawai'i Life Sciences Consortium. Sam serves on the Board of Trustees for the [Native Hawaiian Culture and Arts Program](#) (NHCAP), the [Bishop Museum Association Council](#), and as an at-large member of the Hawai'i State [Board of Land and Natural Resources](#).

For over 12 years Sam studied *oli* (traditional Hawaiian chant) and hula with Kumu John Keolamaka'āinana Lake, a master of Hawaiian religion and cultural protocols; training that culminated in his *'uniki* (traditional rite of passage) in February 2003 as a *kahuna kākalaleo*, practitioner of Hawaiian chant and protocol. In that capacity he serves as a *Kahuna Pule* (prayer master) at the *heiau* (temple) of Pu'u Koholā at Kawaihae, Island of Hawai'i as part of Nā Wa'a Lālani Kāhuna o Pu'u Koholā. Kumu Lake, before his passing, gave Sam the *kuleana* (responsibility) to continue teaching *oli* for the *hālau* (traditional learning group) on O'ahu, a heavy but joyful responsibility. Sam strives to blend the richness of unique Hawaiian ecosystems with the equally rich culture that developed here.

Sam received his bachelor's degree in Zoology at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. He then went on to

receive his masters in Zoology and doctorate in Animal Behavior at the University of California, Davis. He holds an affiliate faculty post with the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Hawai'i.

This page last revised 22 SEP 2010 by S M Gon III

Web-Source:<http://www.hawaiiecoregionplan.info/samgon.html>