



The Diaries of Max Schlemmer from Laysan Island 1905-1907

By Mark J. Rauzon

One of the most notorious and oft-cited examples of ecological disaster is the effects of introduced rabbits at Laysan Island in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The complete devastation of Laysan Island's plant life and the extinction of three endemic land birds and an unknown numbers of invertebrates was caused when European rabbits were brought ashore. The introduction of rabbits was the final act in the drama of Laysan Island, and it followed a decade of exploitation by guano mining and feather hunting, largely engineered by Mr. Max Schlemmer, the "King of Laysan." Max Schlemmer [See Figure 1] was an employee of the German Company Hackfeld Guano of Honolulu from 1892 until guano mining was no longer profitable on a large scale. Schlemmer then purchased the lease in 1904 and became the sole proprietor of the island for small-scale guano mining. He and his family attempted to live on the island by introducing various livestock and food plants, while also employing and maintaining Japanese laborers to dig guano. The Schlemmer diaries excerpted below are a subset of the entries from his logbooks from 1905-1907.

The diaries became known outside of the Schlemmer family almost one hundred years after they were written. In 2005 the journals were donated to the Smithsonian Institution for archiving, based on a request made to the family. I was aware of some family material based on research I had conducted for my book, *Isles of Refuge*. I felt the material needed to be archived and made the initial request to the family. Dr. Helen James of the Smithsonian Institution agreed to assess the material and transport it to Washington, D.C. The material was accessioned (#05-288) to complement the archives of Dr. Alexander Wetmore's papers. Wetmore, an eminent Smithsonian ornithologist, led the Tanager Expedition to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands in 1923 and knew Schlemmer and his son Eric, who accompanied the expedition. Dr. Elizabeth Flint represented the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which administers Laysan Island as part of a national wildlife refuge, and she has spent a significant amount of time on the island. She stressed to the Schlemmer family the importance of the journals to future Laysan managers. Mr. David Woodside, a friend of the Schlemmer family and a neighbor of the sole surviving child, Helene Schlemmer Brown, who passed away in March 2005, was helpful in facilitating the transfer of these

important papers. The Schlemmer family members had been wondering how such valuable heirloom material might be properly archived and were amenable to relinquishing it when the opportunity was made available. In addition, copies were made for the family, the USFWS and myself; my copy will be donated to the Bishop Museum.

The diaries run over 240 pages and lend a perspective of how Max Schlemmer and his family survived on an isolated atoll at the turn of the century and also provide some insights into how the Laysan ecological collapse was more a 'death by a thousand cuts' than just the ravages of rabbits. For example, in order for a family to flourish, barnyard animals were introduced and allowed to roam free until needed for meat. A tally of the large animals killed includes 13 pigs, three mules, and two calves. The diaries also mention the take of four Hawaiian monk seals and 48 green sea turtles. These species were severely exploited prior to and after Schlemmer's homesteading of Laysan but these depredations may have prevented the species from recovering, and provides an example of the exploitation that led to their eventual listing under the Endangered Species Act.

Oddly, the diaries make no mention of rabbits that were evidently introduced in this time period. Yet the knowledge of rabbits and other domestic animals released at Laysan already made it back to the authorities in Washington. In a letter dated May 15, 1915, Director Hornaday of the N.Y. Zoological Society wrote to Mr. H. Henshaw, Chief Biological Survey with the Dept. of Agriculture, that:

"...we all agree that it would be a mighty good thing to have the rabbits exterminated but knowing Departmental resources as I do, I have no idea that it would be possible for the Department of Agriculture, or for that matter any other department, to find \$4000 that could be made available ...However of course if the extermination could be effected without too great cost, we would also agree that it would be exceedingly desirable. If Max Schlemmer could be exterminated at the same time, it would make the elimination of the pests of Laysan Island quite complete."

So it is fitting his logbooks have made it back to Washington for final repose. Here I have excerpted accounts that portray how day-to-day living on Laysan affected the indigenous

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island species. The entries were selected for scientific interest to modern biologists. I have chosen entries that show the depredation and exploitation of wildlife, include important egg dates, and report odd birds or other items of interest.

The entries, written in English, cover the period Sunday, May 28th 1905 thru Tuesday May 29th 1907, (168 pages) although there are German (37 pages) and Japanese entries (35 pages) that span periods in 1904 to 1908. The excerpts selected here were written by Max Schlemmer, and his associates, Paul Bomke and others. Max himself authored many of the entries but other unknown authors also contributed entries. In time the entire journals should be translated and published for they may include hints about rabbit depredations, and also include daily weather observations that might be useful in contrasting changing conditions at Laysan. The first entry is typical and includes a daily work synopsis:

Sunday May 28, 1905. "Today we did not work; Some Japanese spent the day by catching fish and others stayed home. The weather was as follows: ..." Each entry includes sea and wind conditions, temperature and barometric readings, which I did not include here. I also have included some clarifications within brackets and question marks on unclear words and notations of figures.

1905

- 6/18/05 Today I sent 3 men out for eggs and rest to work on the schooner. We got mutton bird eggs at the rate? of 700.
- 6/21/05 Today I sent some men to the schooner to work, 1 man to get eggs, 1 man to make a road and the rest to make a pig house.
- 6/23/05 I...sent 1 man with my boy to catch canaries. [sic] [Laysan Finch]
- 6/24/05 The men spent the day some in catching fishes and others in getting feathers.
- 6/29/05 We all went down to catch some pigs and cut them.

- 7/3/05 I shot a pig and had 2 men carry it home.
- 7/12/05 Today we gave Captain H 5 or 6 tons more of guano.
- 7/15/05 Paul [Bomke] stuffed a half-white gunie.[Laysan Albatross]
- 7/16/05 This morning a terrible storm started up... part of the guano house roof carried away. The wind blew the sand up like dust.
- 7/22/05 Today the Japanese ... howed up the sand around the potatoes.
- 7/29/05 Master Max Schlemmer was sick. {different handwriting}
- 8/3/05 Paul ...stuffed a boatswain bird [Red-tailed Tropicbird]. The Japanese cleaned up around the Japanese house and helped a little in the kitchen.
- 8/6/05 The Japanese went out shooting and Paul went out and caught eight sharks.
- 8/9/05 Paul sighted the schooner, and when it got nearer we saw that ...the flag was half mast, the sign of death...
- 8/12/05 Paul fixed a railing... to keep the ducks and chickens out of the house.
- 8/20/05 Today we did not work...we all went out for a car ride in the guano field.
- 8/21/05 We saw the steamer Iroquois near to the Island, so I and Paul went out...They brought us some provisions because they were sure we hardly had anything more to eat.
- 9/12/05 Killed 1 pig and brought 1 pig home because she was to get young ones [pregnant].
- 9/13/05 Told my two men to...make canarie bird cages. [for Laysan Finches]
- 9/16/05 Found 5 of our musscovie [sic] ducks sick so we killed them.

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9/28/05	The cocoanut trees which were brought here by Mr. Wilder were planted.		in color, the pieces were as small as a pea to about the size of a fist...Such a thing he has never seen in all the ten years he has been living on the island...The bird which was seen a week ago was found dead this AM. It has a white head and breast, the wings and back were slate-colored and the tips of the wings were jet black. [Black-legged Kittiwake?].
9/29/05	The Japanese man called Fuginaka ... shot three wild ducks.		The first gray head birds seen [Brown Noddies?].
10/2/05	The Japanese were cleaning vegetable garden and planting fresh seeds.		The men went...to gather feathers from the Man-of-war Hawk.
10/3/05	Today the Ironwood Trees were planted. [see Figure 2 of the trees in 1991]		The men were skinning birds.
10/11/05	Mrs. Schlemmer analyzed two samples of guano. The percent of one was twenty four [% phosphate?] and the other was sixteen.	3/25/06	The first black Wideawake eggs was found today.
10/18/05	Went to catch a pig, Mr. Schlemmer saw a hundred ducks and could not shoot one.	4/10/06	The first black Mutton Bird eggs were found today. They were laid right on the ground.
10/19/05	Six cars of Guano (rock) were brought to the Guano House.	4/16/06	Mr. Schlemmer planted lots of date seeds all over the island, they seem to do well here... The men were skinning birds and working around the wharf today.
10/26/05	The first two gunies [albatross] arrived here today...a turtle was caught...	4/18/06	Mr. Schlemmer brought a gray gull home which he shot while it was feeding in the lagoon [immature Glaucous-winged Gull?].
11/10/05	Today the first Guni eggs were found.	4/19/06	The first bush booby [Red-footed Booby] eggs were found. Today also a nest of canary and millerbird eggs.
11/18/05	The men were gathering eggs, and ...did a little work on the railroad track.		Today a nest of wingless bird eggs were found [Laysan Rail].
11/27/05	Today the men repaired the Guano House.		The men went about the island for feathers.
11/28/05	Today the men were repairing the wharf.		The men helped to catch and clean a pig, and in the PM chopped wood.
12/5/05	The men were filling the Mutton bird [Wedge-tailed Shearwaters] holes along the track with dirt.	4/20/06	Today the cow Nellie had a calf.
12/6/05	Today the men brought four cars of Guano to the Guano House (Fine).	4/21/06	The men brought a log of wood from Turtle Point this AM, In the PM they went to gather eggs and brought three young pigs home. [end first journal]
12/22/05	A cow was killed in the evening.	4/22/06	
1906			
1/12/06	The men were clearing away bushes to make a way for railroad track.	4/25/06	
1/23/06	Jap was kicked by mule, and was not able to work.	4/26/06	
1/30/06	The men brought four cars of wood from the beach.	4/28/06	
1/31/06	Men were taking up the track from South Point to put down the Guano field.	5/1/06	
2/6/06	The men were gathering firewood...they went down to the lagoon to catch a pig which was killed.	5/ 8/06	
2/20/06	The men went fishing in the morning and caught five Ulua's [Jacks]	May 9 1906- to May 28 1907	
3/1/06	The first booby eggs were found, and on the second, the first Wideawake eggs [Sooty Terns] were found, and the first big black Mutton birds [Christmas Shearwaters] were seen. Today the first Man-of-war Hawk [Great Frigatebird] eggs were found.	5/14/06	Master Paul...saddled a mule and went to catch two little pigs...and gather a basket of eggs.
3/9/06	Mr. Schlemmer and part of the family went to gather eggs and Man-of-war Hawk feathers, and coming home through the lagoon, they had a lively chase after a little pig which they caught and brought home.	6/4/06	The calf which was sick died yesterday down the lagoon.
3/23/06	Mr. Schlemmer...found at the SW to about the SE part of the island, the beach at high water mark covered with pumice stone gray	6/ 5/06	Master Paul ...saw two brown Boobies but he bought just one home.
		6/9/06	The brown Booby which was seen the other day was shot today. The first eggs of the big gray Mutton Birds [Wedge-tailed Shearwaters] and the smaller black ones were found.
		7/19/06	The first Hau flower of the bushes that were planted a year ago opened.
		8/7/06	knocked down the pigeon house.

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8/20/06	The weather was funny... coming from blow from South Coast ...to bring a bad smell from the lagoon, which was dry for quite a while and having very little rain, the substance in the air makes all the things yellow which we painted with white lead [paint].	11/22/06	we gathered eggs and blew out a barrel full.
9/11/06	shoveling all the bird holes up so as to make ties set up solid.	11/25/06	found a seagull on the beach.
9/25/06	we shot 2 big pigs and wounded one.	11/26/06	Today we gathered eggs and out of all the collections we got 4000 eggs.
9/30/06	This morning at 8AM a son was born to Mr. and Mrs. Max Schlemmer [Otto Paul Conrad]	11/28/06	killed two ducks [Muscovy?] for Thanksgiving.
10/4/06	Mr. Schlemmer...shoot [sic] a half Laysan Island duck & half Spoon-billed duck [Northern Shoveler]	12/06/06	we gathered three buckets of eggs that no bird sat on.
10/10/06	After supper we killed our calf.	12/11/06	[made] wood ash and eggs since we had no sement [sic].
10/12/06	Made lime. We have found red-footed booby laying eggs in time of year which has never happened before.	12/24/06	Today we made sausage and celebrated Christmas eve.
10/14/06	Killed a turtle and cooked some of the meat for the chickens.	1907	
10/18/06	Shot some curlews and plovers.	1/2/07	Today we examined the fields& picked out spaces of guano.
10/19/06	killed 28 manofwar hogs [hawks] for the ducks, and saw a black gunie [Black-footed Albatross]	2/3/07	We shot a seal and skinned it, its length was about 7 feet.
10/20/06	killed 30 hogs [hawks] for the ducks and chickens.	2/22/07	Boiled the fat out of the boar and shot a seal which swam away from shore and didn't return. [Feb was mainly spent guano digging, March collecting wood.]
10/23/06	we skinned 30 manofwar hawks for duck feed... and cooked the birds.	3/26/07	Today the black [cow] got a calf.
10/24/06	we killed hawks and in the PM we cooked them.	3/27/07	got manofwar hawk feathers.
10/26/06	brought over 14 turtles which we caught during the night and killed one.	4/2/07	we caught two turtles & fixed the boat.
11/08/06	Mr. Schlemmer found the first gunie eggs.	4/17/07	we went for feathers & killed the calf.
11/10/06	went for eggs and found three.	5/1/07	we shot a seal and killed a turtle.
11/15/06	it was Mrs. Schlemmer's birthday.	5/2/07	on board [U.S.S. Annapolis] with Mr. Schlemmer and two daughters as passengers.
11/16/06	we went for eggs to pickles [picked?] two tubs full.	5/3/07	we cooked meat for our fowls.
11/19/06	we brought four bascets [sic] of eggs in.	5/4/07	we went for turtles and got feathers.
		5/8/07	we went for eggs and feathers.
		5/23/07	we went shooting and gathered Black turn [sic] eggs.
		5/24/07	Today, we killed a turtle, blew out eggs and got feathers.
		5/29/07	Last entry in English, narrative continues in German and Japanese.

BOOK REVIEW

By Mark J. Rauzon

Max Schlemmer, Hawaii's King of Laysan Island

by Tom E. Unger. 2003. Pp.138. ISBN: 0-595-29988 pkbk.. \$14.95. To order go to www.iUniverse.com

This personal story of The King of Laysan by his grandson was published in 2003 and received little notice. I was alerted to the book two years after publication when I facilitated the family archives storage in the Smithsonian Institute. The author, Mr. Unger, a Pearl Harbor attack survivor, was also caretaking the papers and he generously gave us copies of his work as well as entrusting his family's history into the federal archives. I

had previous written about Max in my book, Isles of Refuge: History and Wildlife of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, and through the aloha of another relative, Max's daughter Helene Brown, I was familiar with some of the family history. But Mr. Unger rounds out the portrait of his irascible granddad Max, who was, at various turns, a renaissance man, a whaler, a constable, a sugar plantation manager, and sea captain, and a motorman for Honolulu Rapid Transit as well as a devoted father of 17 children, 15 of whom lived to adulthood.

Biologists are most interested in Max Schlemmer's Laysan years and Unger provides details and photos not found elsewhere in print. Numerous family pictures and copies of legal documents are placed throughout the very readable text. Details of the years on Laysan and in Honolulu are providing by Unger in the context set forth in the Introduction.

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“This is the story of my grandfather, Maximillian Joseph August Schlemmer who dreamed of establishing a “kingdom” on the island of Laysan. Max’s life was intimately involved with the island of Laysan from 1893 through 1915. Max established his home there in the early years. Five of his children were born there including my Mother, Ottilie Laysan Schelmmmer Unger in 1897. This is also the story of the life and death of an island.”

In his early years in Hawaii, Max gained “squatter’s rights” to Laysan Island. Later he established his home on this tiny, distant, and isolated island. Though many of his business ventures failed, he still dreamed of a “kingdom” on Laysan Island. Perhaps he dreamed and schemed also about the vast riches to be gained in the bird plumage trade before it became illegal.

Max Schlemmer was a man of his times. He was involved in the rioting which led to the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy and to Hawaii becoming the Territory of Hawaii by virtue of its annexation to the U.S. Max was a constant gadfly to the local authorities; his actions often led him into uncharted waters and his escapades reverberated as far away as Washington D.C.

This is a rare look into the background of one of Hawaii’s most notorious characters and should be on the shelves of anyone fascinated with local history as well as the outer reaches of Hawaii and the gem of the Leeward Islands, lovely Laysan.

53rd Hawai‘i State Science and Engineering Fair

Every year the Hawai‘i Audubon Society Awards two students for their projects on natural science. We give one senior award and one junior award. This years recipients are Fred Kealoha, Senior Award and Laurel Fongblatt, Junior Award. Congratulations to both!!

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BYUH Museum of Natural History

We still have room so Please sign up with Casey at 528-1432 or by email hiaudsoc@pixi.com

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Father Goose

By Arleone Dibben-Young¹

Ah Fat Lee, known as Father Goose for his work with the endangered nēnē (Hawaiian Goose, *Branta sandvicensis*), passed away at the age of 96 near his home in Kawaihae, Hawai'i Island. Mr. Lee also propagated the endangered koloa (Hawaiian Duck, *Anas wyvilliana*) and Laysan Duck (*Anas laysanensis*).

Born in Halawa, Mr. Lee attended Hilo High School, working and living in a downtown Hilo general store until he graduated in 1931. Transitioning through several jobs, Mr. Lee was employed on Johnston Island when Pearl Harbor was bombed in 1941. He saved his money during the war and dreamed of going to college to become a veterinarian, but many returning war veterans had the same idea and the limited spaces available were quickly taken.

After WW II, Mr. Lee became the poultry superintendent for Parker Ranch in Waimea. When a position at the Nēnē Restoration Project (later named Pōhakuoa Endangered Species Facility) became available he landed the third slot on the civil service waiting list. In 1995, Mr. Lee was interviewed and commented that neither of his two predecessors was familiar with the local terrain and were unable to read maps, thus got lost while doing nēnē surveys. Ah Fat Lee – who had spent much time hunting and hiking in the saddle area of Hawai'i Is. and knew the geography well – was offered the job in 1955. Field work initially consumed his days, but it wasn't long before he was assigned as the fulltime nēnē propagator. Based on his previous poultry experience, Mr. Lee developed a record keeping system to preserve the genetic diversity of the nēnē, koloa, and Laysan Duck.

Mr. Lee was featured in the November 1965 issue of National Geographic Magazine 'Saving the nēnē, the world's rarest goose' by S. Dillon Ripley, and in 1969, received the American Motors National Conservation Award. Mr. Lee married Barbara Beacon Churchill in 1977, and shortly after they appeared on ABC News Good Morning America which highlighted Mr. Lee's success in raising nēnē. Janet J. Kear and Andrew J. Berger dedicated their 1980 book, The Hawaiian Goose; An experiment in conservation, to Ah Fat Lee, along with conservationist Sir Peter Scott. Ah Fat Lee retired at the age of 70 in 1984, having distributed dozens of nēnē to zoos



Ah Fat Lee

March 13, 1914 – April 6, 2010

across the U.S. and raised 1,765 for release into the wild – a significant contribution to the recovery of the species.

Ah Fat Lee is survived by stepson James Churchill, hānai daughters Betsy Gagné and Helen Harris, sister Jennie In, brother Clarence Lee, and numerous nieces and nephews.

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Elepaio Submissions

We are currently accepting submissions for the Elepaio.

Please send in your scientific articles, short stories, poems, and photos.

Email submissions to hiaudsoc@pixi.com

Calling all Birders

I have been receiving many calls from visiting birders that would like to meet up with local birders to go out birding for a day while they are visiting. If you are willing to take out visitors please contact Casey at 528-1432 or by email at hiaudsoc@pixi.com. Please let me know what days are best for you as well as what island you are on and the best way to contact you!

Hawaii Audubon Society Bird Sighting Report

Dated: _____

Location: (include elevation and map if possible): _____

Date of Observation: _____

Weather Conditions/ Visibility/Lighting _____

Time of Day and Length of Observation: _____

Name of Observer (s): _____

Distance to Bird in Feet: _____

Equipment Used to Observe (eye only, binoculars, spotting scope, camera): _____

Description of Habitat (forest, field, urban, rural, agricultural): _____

Description of Bird (s):

Coloration of Head, Stripes? etc.: _____

Coloration/Pattern of Back: _____

Coloration/Pattern of Belly: _____

Bill Shape, Length and Color: _____

Leg Length and Color: _____

Tail Length and Color: _____

Wing Spread, Markings: _____

Suggested Identification: _____

Please Provide a Labeled Sketch of Your Observations Below. Consult "Topography of a Bird" in the Hawaii Audubon Society 2005 Edition of "Hawaii's Birds" for guidance and reference.



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Calendar of Events

May 8 and 9
Pet Expo
Neil Blaisdell Exhibition Hall
10 am to 4 pm

May 15
Field trip to BYU H
Museum of Natural Science
9 am to 11 am

May 22
Endangered Species Day
Honolulu Zoo
10 am to 2 pm

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