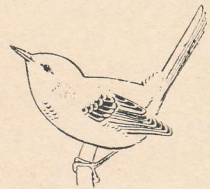


The Elepaio

Official Organ of THE HONOLULU AUDUBON SOCIETY
Honolulu, Hawaii, U.S.A.

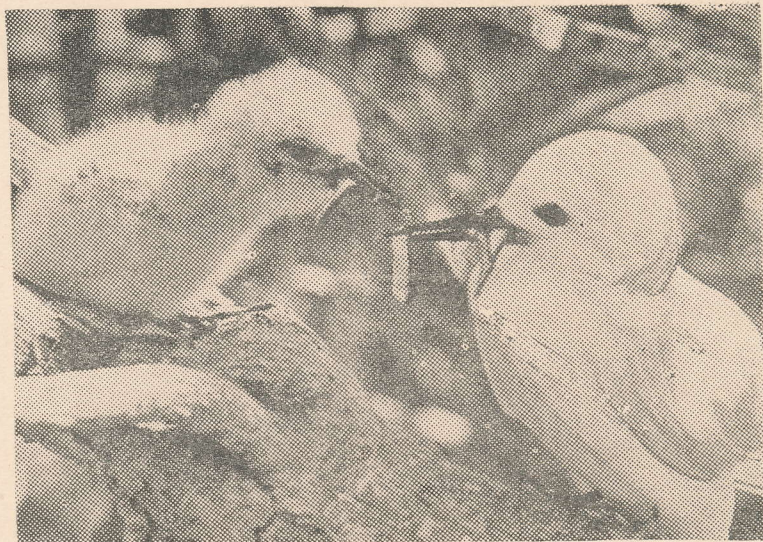
For the Better Protection of Wild Life in Hawaii



"Elepaio"

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This is the picture of the white tern feeding its young, taken by T. M. Blackman on Midway, that won first prize in the recent Bishop Museum-Honolulu Audubon Society Photography Contest. In this number will be found an article by George C. Munro on the white tern.

The picture also presents a puzzle. How does the bird catch all the fish that it is holding in its beak? There are at least eight. It is most unlikely that it could catch them all at once. With the first fish in its beak how does it open its beak to catch the second without losing the first?

This used to puzzle us. With many photographs which we have seen of birds carrying fish in their beaks this question is put, either in print or in the mind of the reader, but no explanation ever has been offered that we have seen.

Yet the explanation may be simple. The fish are held by pressure of the bird's tongue against the upper mandible, leaving the lower mandible free to open and catch more fish. We have never had an opportunity to examine the tongue of a bird which holds several fish in its beak at the same time, perhaps some of our readers have had this opportunity and can tell us if it is possible.

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BIRDS OF HAWAII
and
Adventures in Bird Study
The White or Love Tern
By George C. Munro

The White or Love Tern (Gygis alba rothschildi) is not at present a regular inhabitant of the main group of Hawaii though mentioned by Henshaw as recorded by Sandford B. Dole in his Synopsis of the Birds of Hawaii, 1869.

H. C. Palmer when conducting the Rothschild bird collecting expedition in Hawaii, shot a straggling Bonaparte's gull (Larus philadelphia) on the Polihale lagoon, at Mana, Kauai on March 15, 1891. Mr. Francis Gay of the firm of Gay and Robinson who took a great interest in birds, provisionally gave the Hawaiian name as Manuoku. This was the name given to a small white bird sometimes seen at sea by the natives of Niihau. Neither Mr. Gay nor Mr. Robinson had seen the bird and had only the natives' description of it. Mr. Robinson shortly afterwards visited Niihau and brought back word that Palmer's gull was not the Manuoku of the Niihau natives. The Manuoku, he explained, was a smaller and whiter bird; undoubtedly this was the white tern. Mr. Gay said the natives held the bird as sacred and did not care to kill one for him. Therefore at that time there was no specimen of the white tern in the interesting Gay and Robinson bird collection.

I am confident that Manuoku was the Hawaiian name for the white tern. I know it comes close to the islands of the main group as I saw "one or two" at sea the day before we sighted land to the northwest of Kauai on August 13, 1891. Palmer and I were returning from a collecting cruise to Midway on the 40 ton schooner "Kaalokai", Captain F. D. Walker, Master. The Captain had decided to run north from Midway till he caught the westerly winds to bring him back to the northwest of

Kauai. Though we spent 24 days out of sight of land he was spared the tedious experience of beating up against the northeast trade winds. We arrived a little to the westward of Kauai and so had to make a tack up against the wind. The Kaalokai was in poor seaworthy condition with inadequate sails and could make only about four knots in a good breeze so we could not have been far from land when we sighted the birds. This extra tack and slow speed kept us a little longer in the vicinity but out of sight of Kauai and so we sighted a number of species of Hawaiian seabirds and became familiar with their appearance in flight. I could not be mistaken about this bird as we had seen it on the wing at Nihoa, French Frigate Rock, Necker and Gardiner Islands, on none of which we landed. And ashore on French Frigate shoals, Laysan, Lisiansky and Midway Islands. There was a fair number of the species at Nihoa about 140 miles from the main group and the birds seen off Kauai and Niihau likely came from there. I once found a desiccated body of this bird on the dry eroded uplands of Lanai. There was, however, no evidence of how it got there or how long it had been there. It probably was driven there by a storm. When I was a boy in New Zealand I at times made additions to my bird collection with seabirds driven ashore in storms.

It is quite a mystery why this bird does not inhabit the small islands of the main group at present. It may have been exterminated by former inhabitants of these islands before the more esthetic Hawaiians came. The Hawaiians evidently held it in reverence. It certainly inspires admiration and awe it is such a pure and innocent looking bird. Gordon C. Aymar in his book "Bird Flight" says of it: "There is something ethereal about the White or Love Tern which seems to remove it from this world."

The White Tern (Gygis alba) of which the Hawaiian bird is a subspecies is I am told by Mr. Kenneth Emory a sacred bird in the Society,

Cook and Austral groups to the southeast of Hawaii. That on the Cook Islands it is called Kakia and on the Austral Islands Aaia. Andrew's Hawaiian dictionary gives the name Aaianukeakane as "the name of a bird" and refers to A; and it gives A as "the name of a large seabird often caught by the natives also called aaianukeakane feathers white." Aa is given as "the name of a bird that hunts fish during the day but flies back to the mountains at night." Possibly the name aaianukeakane was applied to other birds here in memory of the absent white tern. It is only petrels and tropic birds that go to the mountains from the sea. Mr. Aylmer Robinson tells me that A is the name at present given by the natives of Niihau to the three species of boobies. Nukea means white and two of these are almost all white.

Manuoku: manu means bird, ohu and oha is to set a bird near a snare to tempt or catch another." But the original name might have been ohu. "Ohu: a fog, a mist, a cloud. The breath of a person on a cold morning." This surely describes the beautiful white tern as it flies around one's head. It is their regular habit to fly close to a person's head uttering a curious little croaking cry. Twelve of them accompanied me for more than half a mile on July 26, 1938 on Enderbury Island. They circled round and round my head as I walked across the island.

When nesting in a tree it selects a scar, knothole, crack or fork of a branch where it lays its egg; it also lays on rocks and even on the bare ground. It does not sit on the egg but stands by it and spreading out its breast feathers it surrounds the egg and covers it completely. The egg is large, $1\frac{3}{4}$ by $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch in size, almost a perfect oval with both ends equally rounded. Its nesting place is so well selected that there is no danger of it rolling off as an oval egg might do on an even surface. The egg has brown and black streaks thickly on a greyish ground, sometimes with a thicker band round one

end. The young are greyish with dark spots. When hatched they cling to their perch with great tenacity. One was in the doorway of a ship-wrecked seafarers' house on Midway Island. A picture was taken of myself unawares to me while playing with this little bird with my bare foot. My great toe was in front of the bird's head. Every time I wagged my toe the little thing would seize it in its beak and pull and tug at it for some time. Then as long as the toe was kept still it did not notice it but as soon as it moved it was seized again and another attempt made to pull it off. I could not be sure if it thought the toe was food or it was acting in self defense.

The white tern feeds on little shining fishes as dainty looking as itself. When gathering them for its young it collects a number crosswise in its beak till sometimes the beak is filled from gape to point. I have seen them with several but the climax came when Mr. T. M. Blackman showed me a photograph he had taken on Midway of a bird of this species sitting by its young one with eight or ten little fishes held in its beak. I counted eight but that was not all there were. How it got the last ones in without losing the others is a puzzle. To see this beautiful little white bird with two or three pretty little shining fishes held crosswise in its blue and black beak is a pretty sight. Mr. R. S. Bell of the Kermadec Islands near New Zealand as quoted in Oliver's "New Zealand Birds" tells how the closely allied (Gygis alba royanus) carefully trims the receptacle for its egg; catches its prey as they jump from the water and carries them crosswise head to tail in its beak. It is a clever as well as a beautiful bird.

The white tern is $13\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, with the slender pointed wings and forked tail of some of the terns. All its feathers are pure white except the midribs of the large wing and tail feathers which are light brown. Its head seems large and its big black eyes are prominent. The

basal portion of its beak is blue and the outer end black. Legs and toes are light blue, webs white and claws black. Everything about the bird is dainty and it stirs the hearts of the strongest men. Gygis alba rothschildi is smaller and has a shorter beak than several other subspecies to the south of Hawaii. It is not known, however, which subspecies inhabits the nearest groups the Equatorial and Phoenix Islands. It is hoped that this will be cleared up before long. It would be unfortunate if it differs from ours if some bird lover would bring some to our waters here and so mix them up. We should try and keep ours distinct both for scientific and sentimental reasons but we should have it where such a beautiful bird could be seen by many people. There is no law at present to prevent anyone bringing them to the waters in our vicinity. It would therefore be desirable to have ours established in the main group and prevent if possible any other subspecies being introduced.

Since writing the first part of this paper I have seen a specimen of this bird in the Bishop Museum that had been found in Honolulu dead on a doorstep after a heavy blow. Also I found in my journal a note that Solo Mahoe saw in 1936 three small white birds with the noio and noddys at the island of Mokulea. I have had other reports of a small white bird being seen at other coastal islands. So it seems possible that the species is slowly working back to the main group. We should do everything to encourage and help it in this.

CHRISTMAS CENSUS 1940

The Society's Bird Census report is given below. It is hardly comparable to last year's report since more ground was covered this year. The increase in the numbers of many of the birds is probably due to this. In future years it is to be hoped that the same ground will be covered as this year, thus giving added value to each report.

Oahu, Hawaii. Dec 22, 8.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. Six observers in two parties. Clear; light west wind, temperature 82 degrees at start, 80 degrees at finish.

Party I, forest trails, Poamoho-Summit-Castle; elevation 1490-2800-250 ft.; miles, 15; hours, 9.

Party II, Kahuku ranch to Kahuku, pasture lands along shore, marsh, lake; miles, 3; hours, 3.

Total party miles, 18; total party hours, 12.

Night heron, 5; pintail, 29; Hawaiian gallinule, 2; Hawaiian coot, 34; Pacific golden plover, 243; wandering tattler, 5; turnstone, 133; sanderling 38; Chinese turtle dove, 16; barred dove, 76; sky lark, 16; Chinese thrush, 9; Japanese hill robin, 5; Oahu elepaio, 32; mynah, 144; white-eye, 23; iiwi, 4; apapane, 119; Oahu amakihi, 13; Oahu creeper, 8; ricebird, 75; Kentucky cardinal, 2; house sparrow, 16; house finch, 9; Brazilian cardinal, 2.

Total, 25 species; 1058 individuals.

Grenville Hatch, David Woodside, George Krall, Charles Dunn, E. H. Bryan, Jr., J. d'Arcy Northwood.

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