

# *The Elepaio*

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

For the Better Protection of Wild Life in Hawaii



"Elepaio"

November  
1940

Vol. 1, No. 8



This beautiful picture of a white tern settling on its egg is one of the winning photographs entered by T. M. Blackman in the recent Bishop Museum-Honolulu Audubon Society Photography Contest. This contest hopes to stimulate an interest in bird photography in the Islands. Photographs of birds frequently appear in the Mainland magazines, but little work has been done on Hawaiian birds. A second contest for 1941 is announced for the three best photographs of native Hawaiian birds, excluding sea birds. Cash prizes to the value of \$20.00 are offered.

The picture above was taken on Midway. It is surprising that the egg remains in such a precarious position, but it is the usual site for the nest. Unfortunately we have no white terns around the main islands, the nesting place nearest Oahu is Nihoa, 120 miles northwest of Niihau.

These terns are sea birds, living on small fish, and are pure white except for the black bill, eyes and feet. They are gentle and inquisitive in their manner, in contrast to the other terns, which greet a visitor to their nesting place with harsh cries and fierce swoops. Their gentle beauty has earned them the name of "love birds."

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## Birds of Hawaii

## The Wedge-tailed Shearwater - Continued

By George C. Munro

Numbers again leave at daylight for the open sea. About the end of May nearly all leave and very few come in at night till the middle of June when they return and all lay their one egg within a few days of each other. The eggs hatch about the end of July and the old birds leave about November and the young follow a few weeks afterwards.

In July 1937 before starting to band the wedge-tailed shearwaters I took a pair as museum specimens. Careful measurements and descriptions showed little difference between the sexes. However, in the process of banding by carefully noting these differences, such as a slightly thicker leg in the male; it seemed as if the male incubates the egg, that the female cares for the young in its early stages and both share in feeding the well grown chick. The newly hatched chick is a puffball of greyish down varying in shade from light to dark grey. It is soon independent of the shelter of its parent and sits alone. Like the old bird it is strong in defense and can bite effectively.

During April and May pairs can be found in holes and burrows. From the middle of June to the end of July one bird at a time sits on the egg. From shortly after hatching till November only the young bird is present in the burrows in the daytime. From April to November except during the first two weeks of June large numbers of old birds come in to the nesting places at night. When the old birds leave the islands the fat on the young birds, no longer fed, becomes reduced by hunger. They then come out of the burrows and get ready for their flight to sea. They apparently follow their parents to the feeding grounds, but how they find their way is something we have yet to find out. Further investigations may throw light on this. That there



are indications on the water and in the air that tell seabirds when they are within the limits of their range is certain.

When digging its burrow the bird uses its hooked bill to loosen the sand and dirt. Then lying on its side it kicks back the loose material with its upper foot. The dust does not lie at the entrance of the burrow as with the rabbit but is scattered and is quite unnoticable.

A remarkable fact in connection with the laying of the shearwater is its uniformity, recurring year after year, between fixed dates without variation. In the Kermadec Islands of the South Pacific most of the individuals of the species lay their eggs within a few days of each other. In 1891 when collecting birds on Laysan Island we found numbers of the sub-species, such as we have here off the east coast of Oahu, laid their eggs between the 15th and 18th of June. They have done likewise for the last four years on the islands off Oahu. It is an astonishing thing for a bird to keep its laying time within such close limits for nearly half a century.

The shearwater's egg when fresh laid is delicate white in color. They are palatable when cooked as I found when the Guano Company's people used them on Laysan, for the few days while they were fresh, in 1891. Perhaps this is because the regular diet of the birds is squids. I have noticed since that the eggs of other seabirds that feed largely on squids are used by the residents of small coral islands with apparent relish. When nesting sites are few there is competition for the best positions. There is much fighting and noise and some birds are forced to lay on the surface of the ground. If there is no overhead cover the birds desert these exposed eggs and they are usually devoured by waiting mynahs.

Banding has given us evidence that the birds return to the same island to nest year after year. Out of 733 cases of returned birds in



1939 there were only 10 instances of birds returning to a different island to that on which they were banded. There is also evidence that groups keep together and return at the same time to the island. This seems strange as the birds arrive and depart singly and not in flocks. Also the mated pairs of one season return together or meet again on the island the following season. There are six instances of pairs of 1938 being together in 1939 and we have other evidence pointing to the same conclusion.

I have watched shearwaters for long periods without seeing them stop on the water or take any food therefrom. However, on one occasion we sailed through a mass of these birds which looked like an island from a distance. They were feeding without effort from the surface of the water. This is known as rafting in referring to these birds. The shoals of squids come to the surface of the water on dull days and probably during the evening and night. When feeding their young they come to the islands at night crammed with a cigar shaped squid about four inches long. When they arrive they enter the burrows and regurgitate the food for the young, probably entering the burrow more than once during the night to do so. Between times they gather on the surface in groups and spend a social time together. The birds start to come in about dusk and there is evidence that groups come in at different times in the night. By daylight most of the departing birds are gone, each bird leaving independently as they arrived. Several circuits of the nesting place are made on the wing on arrival and before leaving. This furnishes a favorable time for study of their wonderful flight. It is astonishing to see them sailing up against a strong wind without any movement of their wings.

At all times in the night but especially before the birds depart for the sea in the morning the nesting place resounds with their mournful and wailing cries. These vary from a low mournful moan



(made by the expiratory breath) alternating with a peculiar snarling sound during inspiration through the nostrils with the bill closed, and ending with a loud caterwaul. At times the sound is somewhat like that of fighting cats, at others like human babies crying. It is altogether mournful and weird especially when a large number of birds perform at once. The wailing cry, however, when given in a subdued tone by the chick calling for food can be quite musical.

By a rough estimate there are breeding on the islands off the east coast of Oahu probably 30,000 birds of this species. I have placed over 2600 bands on birds of this species on the little island of Popoia off Kailua and there are larger numbers on other islands. Mr. Alona of Waimanalo states that there were no seabirds on Manana when he was a youth forty years ago. Probably the birds migrated here when disturbed by guano diggers on islands to the south or more likely from Laysan and Lisiansky when rabbits spoiled their nesting places on those islands by killing off the protecting grasses. This is surely an additional reason why we should use every effort to preserve these and other seabirds and improve conditions for them here if they have come for refuge from unfavorable conditions elsewhere. Oceanic islands are now being brought into use for landing stations and fortified defenses. Many birds will thus be displaced from their ancestral nidus. If they are encouraged to take refuge with us they will increase to such numbers as to become another of the scenic attractions of these islands as in fact Moku Manu is at present but landing on it is so difficult that few people can enjoy the wonderful bird sights there. I landed on the island four times in 1937 but have succeeded in making but one landing there since.

From time to time in these articles the wedge-tailed shearwater will be mentioned and new facts recorded as they come to light.



We are printing a letter sent to the editors of the Honolulu Advertiser and the Honolulu Star-Bulletin concerning the growing use of feathers as ornaments in women's hats. This is distressing to bird lovers and we are sure that Audubon members will do all they can to discourage it. The letters were signed by the presidents of the Hui Manu and the Honolulu Audubon Society. The text of the letter follows:

The last number of Bird-Lore (Vol XLIII, No 5), the organ of the National Audubon Society, contains an article entitled "Massacred for Millinery", by Richard H. Pough. It is a report of an investigation into the kinds and sources of the feathers now so noticeable in women's hats. The article is further emphasized by a forceful denunciation of the trade by Dr. Murphy, president of the Society.

It has been proved that the feathers of more than forty species of wild birds are now being sold, including those of the condor, golden eagle, bald eagle (our national bird), whistling swan, osprey, great blue heron, at least eight kinds of pheasants and many foreign birds. Also on the list are the short-tailed, black-footed and Laysan albatrosses, the two latter nesting on the islands of the Hawaiian group. Japanese plumers are a real threat to all three albatrosses and have already practically exterminated the short-tailed albatross, which nests on Japanese-controlled islands.

Thirty years ago the Society aroused public sentiment against the use of feathers and bodies of birds as ornaments. In Venezuela alone more than a million and a half egrets, which supplied the white "osprey" plumes, were killed in one year. An Audubon warden was killed while protecting birds from the plume hunters. When the public realised that millions of birds were being slaughtered and that some of the most beautiful American birds had been almost wiped out laws were passed prohibiting the importation, sale and possession for sale of feathers and the trade collapsed.

"But the cycle of fashion has changed once again, and slowly, under the protection of legal loopholes, a reliance upon a distorted terminology, and ignorance, the traffic is being resumed".

The most potent weapon is public opinion. The women of Hawaii have always been vigorous in their defense of the beauties of the Islands. The Outdoor Circle has banished unsightly billboards from our scenery and in many ways has made Hawaii even more beautiful. The women have it in their power to stop this barbarous trade. They can refuse to buy hats carrying any kind of feathers and can also make their disapproval plain to the shop people and to those who in ignorance wear such ornaments. Only those who are ignorant of the destruction of beautiful wild birds could wear feathers.