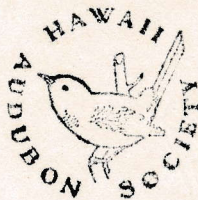


# THE ELEPAIO

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For the Better Protection  
of Wildlife in Hawaii

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## PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis dominica fulva*

By George C. Munro

The use of the name "Kolea" in connection with the recent Longshoremen's strike in Hawaii gave rise to some behind the scenes controversy on the food habits of the Pacific golden plover. This was because kolea is one of the names it has been known by. It is also called lesser Australian, Asiatic and Eastern golden plover. The former because it is smaller than the American golden plover, and the latter because it migrates from Siberia through China. I shall not go into the arguments against the bird as most of them are plainly silly. One of these, however, was that it fed on berries, taking the food from the nene or Hawaiian goose. Before human beings came to Hawaii the undisturbed balance of nature took care of that. Since the white man came there have been many additions to these berries and wild fruits, but both nene and plover have decreased in numbers. However, this statement brought up the question of what the plover feeds on after coming back from the Arctic. According to Henshaw, it arrives back in the middle of August before the early winter rains have brought on an excess of insect life. It may have a period of restricted food supply before leaving in May but has become so excessively fat on caterpillars and moths that this no doubt makes little difference to it. When it returns insect food is also short and unless it feeds to some extent on seeds and berries it must go on short commons for awhile. Henshaw states in "Birds of the Hawaiian Islands" that when the old birds arrive back they are very fat, so this may take them over till the insects increase.

Mr. Cheesman, Curator of the Auckland, New Zealand, Museum at the time, told me many years ago of a man who had just returned from an investigation of the birds in a part of Siberia. He said in one place the winter snowfall came with amazing regularity, almost to the day, and the migratory birds left just in time to avoid it. In the spring it melted at the same time every year and the birds arrived on time to feed on the berries that had been preserved under the blanket of snow. One species of these was undoubtedly our *Pluvialis*. I have seen it stated that when the plover arrives in Alaska it feeds on crow berries, probably preserved in the same way. Dr. Cushman Murphy in "Oceanic Birds of South America" mentions about "crowberries, diddle dee," in the Falkland Islands, and in another place "diddle dee native heath." Perhaps the seed was carried there by the American golden plover which migrates that distance from Labrador, or maybe from there to Labrador.

When our plover arrives in the Arctic the long day brings insect life very abundantly. The chicks require little care and fly when very young. Dr. Henshaw who, in the 10 years he lived in Hilo, had good opportunities to study the plover, states that the first plovers to arrive in Hawaii are mostly males. He inferred, and I think rightly, that most of the females waited to guide the young birds which came a few weeks later. He said that when the young birds arrived they were in thin condition.



If our plover comes here from Alaska, its flyway would most likely be direct to the island of Hawaii. If it landed on the high lava flows there, it would find the native strawberry, ohelo papa (Fragaria chilensis) which according to Hillibrand has large fruits "there being abundance of it between May and September." In November, 1891, I was up to between 7,000 and 9,000 feet elevation above Honouliuli on Maunaloa and saw the plant in plenty but not in fruit. At about 5,000 feet there was plenty of Kukainene (Coprosma ernodeoides) trailing over the open lava flows. I noted its black fruits. We saw ohelo (Vaccinium) and kukainene at about 7,000 feet in December fruiting in quantity on Hualalai, where we spent two days. Native crows were in plenty but we saw no plover. These are fruits upon which the plover could easily feed. Others that might not be quite so accessible to it would be painiu (Astelia veratroides), uki (Dianella odorata) and the Hawaiian raspberry, akala (Rubus hawaiiensis or macraei). I noted them fruiting about November in the forest. At a lower elevation they might use ulei (Osteomeles anthyllidifolia) and kawau or puakeawe (Stephelia tameiameia). The Rothschild expedition collected plover on Kauai and Hawaii when I was with it. Insects only were in all stomachs except at Mana, Kauai, where a few small black seeds were noticeable, as in other of the shore birds at that time. This is study for our young ornithologists to find what the plovers feed on in the high mountains when they return and before they leave. It is known that they roost on the upland lava flows as well as on islands off the coast. I saw flocks in 1891 when camped on the edge of the forest at about 1,000 feet elevation above Makaweli, Kauai, flying in the evening towards the mountain top, perhaps to roost on the open mountain bogs. They were very numerous then on the open "kula" lands above Makaweli, now growing fields of cane.

It might be of interest here to quote from my journal in 1891 "... November 16 ... the trail took us for a long time through the fern. It was very dense and native raspberries were plentiful amongst it. I picked some berries off the latter which would be nearly an inch in diameter, a trifle bitter to the taste. Wild strawberries were abundant here but I have seen no fruit on them yet. After passing through the fern, ohelo plants were plentiful but not many in fruit. The vine with the black berry upon which I believe the nene feeds was also abundant after getting above the fern." November 17 ... "The main mass of the bush is koa with a mingled mass of dark green fern and raspberry bushes, the latter nearly 12 feet high." November 20 ... "Wild strawberry plants grow plentifully up on the mountain."

This was at a new dairy about 6,000 feet elevation and on the 20th we ascended with a pig hunting party to probably 9,000 feet. It can be seen that under these primitive conditions there would be berries in plenty in the autumn. Conditions for the plover may be even better today as the lava flows will be much as of old and the belts of thick forest which interspersed the lava flows will be thinned out by cattle and grass taking the place of fern and underbrush as I found at about 5,000 feet in 1937. At that time in that locality there were open grassy glades surrounded by thick forest. The cattle were fat and healthy though they never drank water. They obtained sufficient moisture from the dew which was thick on the grass before noon till next morning. The fogbank came up from the sea about 10 A.M. When we came round to Waimea from Kona our horses needed urging to get them to cross a shallow stream. They had probably never seen a stream of water before.

If our plover comes from Siberia it would probably come via the Aleutians as mentioned by F. W. Preston in the very interesting quotation from his article in the "Auk" in the "Elepaio" of August. It would then likely make a landing at Midway and pass along the Hawaiian chain to the main group.



We should never rest till this wonderful bird has complete protection over all its range. As far as Hawaii is concerned it does no harm and an immense amount of good. In larger numbers it would do more. I doubt very much that it does harm anywhere. Its wonderful breeding feat should give it immunity from persecution. You hunt a pheasant with a dog and it has a chance to escape the gun. But the plover was shot from behind blinds, enticed by decoys, when it came to the lowland lagoons to quench its thirst. And this after doing a wonderful job in stopping raids of caterpillars on the ranch grasses and sugar cane. I may be criticized for calling this pot shooting but am sure that if the plover were not a delicious table bird it would not be sought after by sportsmen any more than the bar-shouldered dove.

The Pacific golden plover is under Federal protection and protected locally in Hawaii as well. But there is always someone who is trying to find a loophole in the law to bring it back under the guns. So the Hawaii Audubon Society, all bird lovers, and all those interested in agriculture and grazing, (and who in Hawaii is not?) must be ever vigilant. We must watch for its continued protection in Hawaii, and to obtain as much protection as possible in other places it visits. Perkins and Henshaw, both eminent naturalists who studied the plover in Hawaii, strongly advocated its protection for its usefulness to agriculture and grazing.

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#### REPORT ON PART OF A TALK ON THE BIRDS OF NEW CALEDONIA GIVEN BY MR. EDWIN H. BRYAN, Jr.

Mr. Edwin H. Bryan, just returned from a four-month period of research for the South Pacific Commission at Noumea, New Caledonia, addressed the Society on September 19, 1949, concerning the birds of the region and their geographical setting:

New Caledonia is an island shaped like a cigar, or an exclamation point, complete with the period - the island called the Isle of Pines. It is 300 miles long and 40 miles wide--twice the area of the Island of Hawaii, and divided by a double range of high mountains which must be crossed to go anywhere on the other side. The passes are something like the Pali, and the mountains are higher. The town of Noumea is on a peninsula on the southern tip of the island and is the capital of French Oceania and the largest city in the South Pacific. This town is a curious blending of the old and the modern--seaplanes in the harbor and backwoods ways of doing things. The population is at least half French, the other half is partly Papuan, partly Melanesian.

The Papuans are the second group who came into the Pacific - the Australians were first. The Papuans settled in New Guinea and in the islands of the south east and even north east Pacific, New Britain, New Ireland, New Caledonia. Many years later the Melanesians came and settled along the coast, either exterminating the Papuans, or driving them into the hills. In time a sort of trade developed between the two groups - the hill people bringing down birds and other upland products and taking back shells and salt. Now the two groups are well intermixed, but non-Melanesian characteristics and features are most obvious in many of the natives. The native people live in small villages, mostly in the north and on the eastern coast, very few in the south west part of the island. They used to be cannibals, but generally have abandoned this practice. However, quite recently a couple of Frenchmen were killed and eaten, not for reasons of hunger, but because of a grudge now believed to be settled.



Climatically the island is similar to our own group in that the east side is very wet and lush with vegetation where all the water is drawn out of the clouds over the mountain ranges, and the west side is extremely dry and barren. Vegetation on the dry side is similar to ours - there is a tree that reminds you of the algaroba, and there is a paper bark with a bottle brush flower similar to the one we know, called Nouuli. One of the difficulties in identifying plants or insects in this and other areas is the one of terminology - the French use one form, the Australians another, and the American still another for the same plant!

The birds that inhabit this area are well and interestingly described in the book, Birds of the Southwest Pacific, by Ernst Mayr. There are about 70 species of land birds in New Caledonia. The similarity of appearance of the dry side to our own area, the same weeds and trees, is further emphasized by the prevalence of the mynah bird, with the same noisy habits that we know. There is also a small black starling similar to the one of Guam. Sea birds are conspicuous by their absence. No migratory birds were seen. There were a few gulls - not terns, but true gulls. Such other species as cormorants, grebes, herons, osprey, ducks - about 7 or 8 altogether - are supposed to be present, but I was not in a position to see any of them. The Sacred Heron is also supposed to be there, but though I have seen it in both the white and blue phases in the Marshalls and the Carolines, I did not see it in New Caledonia, not being in the area of marshes and ponds.

The Kagu is the outstanding bird of the island historically, as is the Iiwi in Hawaii, though their feathers were not used for featherwork, nor were they edible. The bird is flightless, ground-living, and is thus due for extinction. It is so friendly and helpless that it is especially subjected to persecution, and never having been abundant, it has moved back into the forest in self defense. Today it is extremely rare, and the only reason there are any left is because it has so much space, and the wild dogs, cats, and hunters are fewer in the mountain recesses. The bird is large (22-23 inches), light ash gray crest, lower belly buff grey, with black and white chest bars, and bars on the wings which are conspicuous when the wings are spread. The Kagus are protected now but they cannot be expected to survive another 50 years. They live a long time and have been popular with zoos - many have been known to live 30 years in captivity. They nest on the ground and lay only one egg a season, further reducing their chances of survival. They nest from August to January, and are said to bark like a dog, but then people are inclined to tell tales about these birds. They are also said to make other peculiar noises. The Kagu is a bird everybody talks about but almost no one ever sees. The bird appears on a considerable number of New Caledonia postage stamps.

The pigeons are almost as interesting as the Kagu. There are the red-bellied fruit dove; cloven-feathered dove which is green; the Pacific pigeon, a very lovely bird with bluish green on the wings and a purplish body, which stands 15 inches high. The Giant pigeon stands 20 inches high and is slate grey. It is endemic to the New Caledonia forests, but you find it rarely as it was used as a food by the natives and the French. There is also the white-throated pigeon, slate grey; and the green-winged ground pigeon, 9 inches, which nests on bushes.

There are also lots of parrots and lories. The coconut lory is green, with red and purple and blue on the head. It is quite exciting to see these brilliant birds flying in the wilds. A red-fronted parakeet is  $11\frac{1}{2}$  inches high, but is rare. The crested parakeet is fairly abundant. One of the most interesting birds is the New Zealand cuckoo which breeds in New Zealand and migrates all over the South Pacific - a long tailed bird with rufous bars across the upper parts of the tail. It



is very slender and looks like one of the hawks, and flies very rapidly. It has the same habit of laying its eggs in other birds nests as the other cuckoos.

I did not see either of the two owls - they live largely in cliffs, caves and trees. Neither did I see the nightjars. The swifts were very abundant and one could see them often over the grassy fields, but never on the ground. One is almost jet black, with a white band at the base of the tail; the other is white rumped and about 4 inches long.

The Sacred kingfisher (Halcyon sancta canacorum) is a small bird and is often seen sitting on telephone wires. It looks as if it wore a blue waistcoat and white trousers.

There are 24 species of song birds, most of them quite small, many of them brightly colored. At least five are red, or pink; half a dozen are yellow, green, or olive, including the white-eyes of which there are two, and both similar to ours. The swallows are a Tahitian species that straggled in. One Cuckoo shrike is called a triller. It is small, with a long tail. There are also two species which are grey. The thrush is a sooty brown in color and is fairly abundant. There are two warblers, one with a long tail and one with a fan tail. The latter is quite colorful with bright lemon yellow on the flanks. The five flycatchers were always very interesting to watch.

The crow measures about 15 inches for the female and 17 inches for the male, and is comparatively rare. It is supposed to eat anything - insects, fruit, shells, etc. It is jet black with a bluish tinge.

The first time I saw one of the five honey-eaters I thought it was an Iiwi. It was a little smaller, but had the same general appearance of a red head, and breast and black tail and wings. And it flew the same way except that it was over the hedges. This is the scarlet honeyeater, 4 inches long. There are also the silver-eared honeyeater, barred honey-eater, and the crow honey-eater which is 16 inches high, and black except for reddish-orange wattles. The New Caledonia friar-bird is also a honey-eater.

Of the two weaver finches, one was extremely abundant - we saw literally thousands - around every turn of the road large flocks would take off with from 75 to 100 in one flock. There are the Red-throated parrot finch, and the Red-browed waxbill.

As for the South Pacific Commission, six different nations administer islands in the South Pacific: Australia, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. There are 15 or 16 South Pacific island groups administered in several different ways as mandates, crown colonies (such as Fiji), etc. Tonga is a kingdom; Nauru is a three-way trusteeship under the United Nations. New Caledonia is the richest island in the South Pacific, with nickel in the south and a mountain of chrome in the north. There is also a mountain of iron ore at the southern end, but it is not sufficiently accessible, although the Japanese were mining it before the war.

Each of the groups has its own problems which are variously dealt with by the six administrators. The idea of the Commission is to pool activities in trying to better the conditions of the South Pacific peoples. An agreement was signed by the six nations in 1947 at Canberra at which time it was agreed to establish a research group to see what could be done to improve health and education of the various



peoples. Noumea was chosen as the permanent home of the commission and a secretary general was named: Mr. Forsythe. The 12 commissioners meet twice a year, approve the budget, and lay out policies. The Research Council serves on a voluntary, non-paid basis and is made up of men chosen for their knowledge of the South Pacific and its problems, and represent all six of the nations. Dr. Peter Buck of Hawaii is a member of this council. A series of twenty problems for study in 1949/50 has been laid out revolving around the basic problems of health, social development, education, and agriculture.

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#### LETTERS AND GENERAL NOTES

Manana: ... On September 5th, I had the rare privilege of accompanying the Research committee on a daylight reconnaissance to Manana. Seas were high; landing was difficult and would have been impossible with less skillful boatmen than Alona, and his sons, but by 9 a.m. we were on the island. A large, agitated rabbit (the first of several sighted) bounded up the gully as we landed on the beach. One wonders how they exist, for at this time of the year, the grass and sparse shrubs are dry and brown. Only a few, low plants looked at all succulent, and they seemed untouched by the rabbits.

My last visit to Manana had been in 1946, so that changes in the bird population were of great interest. Before the war, only a few sooty terns were found, on the northern slope. Now these fascinating and strikingly beautiful birds have taken over the higher areas of the island, as was reported by Ruth Dingus in the September Elepaio. We watched with delight the sooties hovering in mid-air, like exquisite Christmas tree ornaments.

Only three or four wedge-tailed shearwater nestlings were found on the landward slope, and no adults were seen in the burrows. The crater was not examined on this trip. The ground is so honey-combed with burrows that despite all care, it is virtually impossible to avoid causing an occasional cave-in - disastrous if a nestling were in the burrow.

Incubation had entirely ceased. A few downy tern nestlings were seen, but most of the chicks were well grown. The ridge was not as densely populated as it is during the summer, when one can hardly step without chick or egg under foot, but I estimated that the bird population has increased several fold over that of 1940, when I first saw the island. Areas formerly thinly populated, or entirely unoccupied are now filled with terns.

Perhaps the unfortunate members who could not accompany us may some day have a part of the joy of that day on Manana, by seeing the pictures which record it. -- Grenville Hatch.

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New York City: ... I was very much disappointed to find out that there is no bird walk here in N.Y. except on Tuesday morning, and only for the month of October, with Miss Wiley of Natural History Museum... The National Audubon Society has no bird walks. Next Tuesday is my last walk with Miss Wiley, after that I am on my own. The Tuesday bird walks are through Central Park... The warblers...catbirds, robins, flickers, grackles, blue jays, mallard and black ducks, heron gulls, white-throated sparrows, chipping and song sparrows, downy woodpeckers, yellow sapsuckers, brown thrashers, hermit thrush and brown creeper are some of the birds we saw. Last



Tuesday was an excellent day,... As we walked into the park from the 77th Street and Central Park West we saw about 3 dozen grackles (bronzed) feeding on the ground, and some taking a bath in the pond. This was a wonderful picture of peaceful busyness. The birds were flying in and out of the weeping willow along the banks, the branches swaying into the water, carrying the birds with them... The flicker is migrating in very large flocks... The robins are everywhere, but they do not sing. We often heard the "meow" of the catbird, but never have seen them very closely, so as we approached the chinaberry and saw the gray bird with black cap feeding on the berries with total disregard for the confusion caused by us, we were unable to keep composed. Of course, if the catbird can excite us to that extent, you can almost guess what happened when we saw the cedar waxwing. Later we saw about 2 dozen waxwings. The unmistakable single note as they flow over, took me back to the spring of 1946 when I saw them traveling in flocks. They are a meticulously groomed bird, and even the New York filth doesn't seem to soil them. While we were still watching the waxwings, a hermit thrush came along to feed on the berries. A yellow bellied sapsucker also performed for us. At that time of the morning in Central Park there is so much activity that one needs about ten eyes. I get excited about all birds and flowers and even squirrels. The mallards and black ducks in the ponds fascinated me so that once I forgot to keep an appointment.-- U. Kojima.

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Kaelepulu Pond: ... On Sept. 24th, a flock of about 200 turnstones and plovers were observed feeding on the mud flats at Kaelepulu pond. Coot on the far side of the pond formed a dense black mass, but were too distant for any estimate of numbers. The most surprising bit of life was an owl which rose from almost under my feet, flew a few feet, and disappeared in another clump of bushes bordering the mud plain. The water was extremely low in the pond, only a fraction of the former water area remaining.-- G. Hatch.

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#### DECEMBER ACTIVITIES:

FIELD TRIP: Remember the Christmas Bird Count, Monday, December 26th. Plan now to join one of the groups to help in that count. There will be no other bird walk in December. For time and meeting place call Miss Ruth Dingus or the person in charge of the route you wish to take:

Ulupau Head: Ruth Dingus - 92340                      Bellows Field: Helen Peterson  
Kaelepulu and Kuapa Ponds: Paul Porter - (office) 52511 (home) Kailua 69445  
Alewa & Kapalama Heights: Mr. and Mrs. Francis Evans - 78335  
Woodlawn & St. Louis Heights: Mr. Charles Dunn - (office) 57911  
Tantalus: Mr. E.B. Hamilton - 703354      Poamoho (weather permitting): Grenville Hatch - 76085

It is urged that each and every member join one of these groups or note and report the birds he sees in his own neighborhood on December 26th. Mrs. Girard Smith will be at 92340 all that day to take down the count when you call. Please cooperate!

MEETING: December 19th, Library of Hawaii Auditorium at 7:30 P.M. This is the annual business meeting with reports of all committees and election of officers.

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