

THE ELEPAIO

Journal of the
Hawaii Audubon Society



For the Better Protection
of Wildlife in Hawaii

Volume 11, Number 11

May 1951

THE SOUTH SEAS IN NEW YORK CITY

The recent visit to Hawaii of Mr. C. V. Whitney, of New York, is excuse enough to remind Honoluluans of the Hall of Pacific Bird Life at the American Museum of Natural History. Too few of us have had a chance to see that beautiful part of the great museum beside Central Park. In a brief visit to Bishop Museum, Mr. Whitney, a trustee of the American Museum, plied with a question, answered that the final exhibits in that hall are now in place - those of the birds of the Arctic and Antarctic, parts of which regions do belong to the Pacific, whether the Tourist Bureau cares or not!

In 1939, the American Museum published (Natural History, 44(2), and Guide Leaflet No. 101) a description of the Whitney Wing, at AMNH, which became the home of the whole Department of Birds. It is hoped that the author, R. C. Murphy, will now write of the completion of the hall, which is a part of the Whitney Wing.

A visitor cannot imagine how much time, thought, study, and money has gone into that "Whitney Memorial Hall of Pacific Bird Life". It is a memorial of Harry Payne Whitney to his father, and the project has been carried on by the son, Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney. It has involved collecting - not only birds, but habitat material, as well - in the Pacific throughout ten years by an expedition ship, the France, followed by other trips by vessel and plane. Some birds collected are now extremely scarce, a few extinct. But collecting was just the beginning; years of study by scientists and preparators were also required.

The ceiling is an elongated dome that looks like the sky itself, white clouds drifting across the blue, the light of full day upon it. Frigate birds, tropic birds, albatross, tern, etc. are in flight, suspended invisibly. Around the sides of the room are eighteen habitat groups, including the Galapagos Islands, the coastal islands of South America, a stirring, mid-ocean scene from the "Roaring Forties", Samoa (the slopes of Savaii "where forest and grassland meet"), the Tuamotus (the island of Hao, an exquisite lagoon scene, with the curve of the islets fading into the distance, atoll birds in the vegetation of the foreground), the Marquesas (Nukuhiva, the valley on Taipi, a fairy tern poised on the limb of a tree), Laysan, thick with nesting albatross, curlews wading at the water's edge. The Hawaiian group is a scene of Kalalau valley on Kauai, the onlooker at the very spot where so many of us have stood - the Kokee outlook. There is the whole 4000 foot dip of the valley, and the deep blue sea beyond, breathtakingly like reality. It was an ideal spot to choose to show the indigenous forest birds. As in all of the groups, several birds are obvious at first glance, but others have to be searched for after reading the label and noting with surprise how many birds are in the scene. Yes, there they are, clearly evident when found, but so cleverly placed that they melt into the foliage - as in nature.

A complete description and set of pictures of the groups will be of great interest and value. We hope they will be available some day. But only seeing the hall and standing before each group, transported to the far place it depicts, can give full appreciation of the varied beauties of nature in the Pacific there represented.

Reviews:

CHECK-LIST OF BIRDS OF THE WORLD, Vol. 7, 1951, by James Lee Peters.

Though the volume does not contain any birds that find their way to Hawaii, it is worth noting an additional volume of this great work is now out. Unfamiliar to our eyes are the broadbills, wood-hewers, ovenbirds, ant-thrushes, ant-pipits and tapaculos.

+++

NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF NEW GEORGIA, CENTRAL SOLOMON ISLANDS, by Charles G. Sibley. (Condor, 53(2):81-92, 1951)

We cannot help but have a cousinly interest in the birds of other islands of the Pacific, some islands so much richer in avifauna than our own, but all of them resting places for the sea birds.

The Central Solomons (or the New Georgia Group) extend about 120 miles at the center of the 600 mile chain of the Solomons. The author was stationed (1944/45) at Munda, in New Georgia, for 116 days, and had chances to visit some of the nearby islands. His contribution to the knowledge of the birds of this area is chiefly in ecology, life history, behavior, and the relationship between molt and gonadal development. Previous knowledge of the birds of the region have been confined to Rothschild and Hartert, in the Novitates Zoologicae, 1901 and 1908; and certain of the American Museum Novitates, by Ernst Mayr and others, being the results of the Whitney South Sea Expedition.

A particularly interesting observation is that of the avifauna of Simbo, a small, still active volcanic island, but recently risen above sea surface. "The principal object of my visit to Simbo was to search for representatives of the polytypic species of the Central Solomons, such as Zosterops rendovae... Although an intensive search of the optimum habitats of the four species was made, none of them was found... apparently the result of the recent igneous origin of Simbo, and the presence of a water barrier of sufficient width to prevent the easy colonization of Simbo by small, sedentary birds." The water barrier is only three miles. "The recent origin of Simbo has not yet allowed sufficient time for chance immigrants of these absent species to become established on this small island." This provides us with food for thought and imagination as to migrations of Hawaiian birds of sedentary habits, greater barriers between islands, but also long stretches of time in which the accidents of immigration allowed distribution of some species.

The major part of this article is a list of over 50 species seen, with notes for each one, as the Least Man-o'-War: "this frigate bird was not common at Munda... approximately 10 were observed plunging into a school of fish... in company with Sterna sp. and Anous sp."; the reef heron "common at Munda, as it is throughout the rest of the southwest Pacific... foraged almost exclusively in the open"; golden plover "common winter visitor at Munda... the birds frequented the bare coral runways of the air strip and the rocks along the shoreline..."; sandpiper, wandering tattler, turnstone, Papuan mynah, Central Solomons white-eye...

+++

NOTES ON THE BIRDS OBSERVED DURING A TRANS-PACIFIC SEA VOYAGE, by Marshall Laird. (Emu, 50(1):175-178, Jan. 1951)

This log of observations of sea birds, on a voyage in March and April, 1950, from Wellington, New Zealand to Philadelphia, follows in style the earlier article by Fleming (Some south Pacific sea-bird logs, by C. A. Fleming, in Emu, 49:169-188, 1950).

The two articles are based on data collected by trained observers (including R. A. Falla and R. B. Sibson). As Fleming says, "One of the most difficult problems of ornithology is the elucidation of the pelagic distribution of oceanic birds." One investigator "considered the difficulties almost insurmountable", and Fleming adds, "The South Pacific Ocean must rank as one of the least known regions of the world, ornithologically." Their data, to them perhaps a mere beginning, makes an impression on a very blank spot.

Few of us have not been curious about the number and "personnel" of the birds of the great, lonely seas. These two articles seem most stimulating, both as to the data collected and the example of observation offered. Perhaps more records could be made of the passage from Hawaii to various ports, by trained observers. Some of the difficulties of recording are indicated in the first article by a sketch showing some eight plumage phases of the wandering albatross. But most sea birds do not baffle with so many changes in appearance. For us, perhaps the problem is whether to become ships' officers or lure ships' officers into the Hawaii Audubon Society.

JOURNAL OF ORNITHOLOGICAL WORK
during the summer of 1937

By Walter R. Donaghho
(continued)

July 2 (continued): Reaching the Keawewai water tanks, I sat down for lunch. The edge of the forest was only 100 feet away and numerous birds flitted about in the ohia and koa - iiwi, apapane, amakihi, linnet, elepaio. After lunch, going ENE into the forest, the floor of which was denuded by cattle, I saw creepers common on the limbs, amakihi in the foliage. Several omau were calling. The koa became more dense and I turned southeast, starting down the mountain toward Kilauea. The koa were magnificent; giant specimens were fully 100 feet in height, and full of birds: omau, iiwi, creepers, many akepiuie and amakihi. Elepaio shared the underbrush with the hill robin and quite a few akiapolau were heard. I had an excellent view of one, 10 feet away in a small tree.

A number of wild pigs were met with, and once several tiny white ones, with black polka dots, ran about grunting.

While climbing over, under and around fallen, mossy logs, and making my way slowly through underbrush of tree and other ferns and akala, I came across a company of green birds feeding in a clump of naio. They were chirping profusely and sometimes I heard a note that closely resembled the English sparrow. I gave a start as a small brilliant, fire-colored bird flew in and perched amongst them. It was a male akepiuie, a bird of great beauty. The brilliant orange of its plumage dazzled and gleamed, though the day was overcast. Quite a few were noted, 22 of them surely, and some heard were uncounted, as their notes resembled those of the creeper to my confusion.

I thought I struck the Puu O-o trail a number of times but every time I followed it until I lost it, so going in a southerly direction and soon coming out of the dense forest into pasture country unfamiliar to me. (I later found out that I was only half way down.) Just before leaving the forest, I passed through a drier area where the undergrowth was naio, in which were a pair of akiapolau which I watched to advantage as they climbed up and down, stopping to whack at and dig away bark and rotten wood for grubs. I thrilled at the strange appearance of the birds with their grotesque bills.

In this forest I had just come through the birds were much more numerous than on the lower slopes (4500 ft.); indeed it was a paradise of birds, perhaps as somewhat in the numbers of Perkins' time, when their haunts were little tampered with by cattle.

A hawk glided out from its perch in a dead koa and circled up into the air as I set out south across the pasture and came upon a lava flow, which I crossed. It was covered with an open forest of scrub ohia which was filled with apapane. I skirted one kipuka of koa and crossed another, in which were hill robins, elepaio, iiwi, and amakihi. A pair of akiapolaau were also heard here. On the other side of the flow, I went through open pasture country, scattered with dead and dying koa, remnants of a magnificent forest. The region resembled that halfway up the Mauna Loa road... I came to a watershed with a long pipe leading to a tank, and, lower down, a corral full of cows which, upon seeing me, started a stampede out of the corral and out over the pasture. I quickly vacated the place.

The kipuka ended here and I crossed a lava flow. Going to the southeast, I passed through scattered groves of ohia and koa, with many single trees in between. Apapane and iiwi were heard and seen frequently, and amakihi, elepaio, and one akepiuie also heard. Soon I came out where I could get a view and was surprised to see Brown's ranch and home pastures right in front of me. It was getting dark.

July 6: A nasty day; despite the mist many apapane flew about close to camp. Trees right beside the cottage had burst into bloom and I watched the apapane feeding from the flowers. They moved slowly among the blossoms. Their movements, as they bent over each flower and drained each tubule of its nectarine contents reminded me of those of a parrot. The amakihi's movements were much more rapid, flitting in and out among the blossoms, now and then poking their proboscis into the honey cups for a sip. A lot of the apapane were young birds.

July 7: This morning at breakfast, I watched an apapane feed its young in a low ohia just outside the window. It stuck its bill down the young bird's open mouth and proceeded to pump up fluid (into the open mouth), much in the manner of a pigeon, but more actively.

This afternoon...drove to kipuka Pualulu, via the old road. It was misty, but cleared when we arrived. I could hear the clatter of multitudes of apapane from the ohia near the gate. Multitudes! We made the circle of the Park to the left, and listed over 600 birds, and this record is short. When two thirds of the way around it started to rain and we had to abandon listing. One tree, covered with masses of ohia blossoms, that stood a little off by itself, was swarming with apapane, a continuous stream of them entering and leaving the tree. Iiwi were there too, not rare.

July 8: Made a recheck of the birds in the Kipuka Puau, rounding the Park, and was astounded by the staggering total of 1022 apapane. There must be about 3000 apapane in that small half mile area of the Park.

On arriving at camp, Craddock handed me a description of a bird that Mr. Williams had given him. The bird, or rather a pair of them, was seen by Williams near Mauna-iki, digging in the ground for insects. They were a shiny brown, with a yellow-orange breast, and a long, straight bill...As far as I know, there is no other bird on the island, native or otherwise, that fits this description. Special efforts should be made to find and procure this bird.

July 12: A month since we arrived. I have covered all the regions except the dense, ohia rain forest, part of which I hope to do tomorrow.

July 13: We arrived (this morning) at Mr. Bryan's just in time - he and Mr. Mackensie were just piling into their car. We drove up the road towards Kulani about three miles and then set out on foot.

The trail led through an open blackberry-covered meadow where a low mist hovered over the ground, peculiar, its height about six feet. We plunged into a tree fern forest,

the sole type of undergrowth for the rest of the trip. Large ohia were scattered here and there in this almost denuded spot. There were also Stroussia, Cheirōdendron, Tetraplasandra, Broussaisia, and other trees. Birds, as would be expected in a forest in this condition, were scarce. However, I noted apapane, elepaio (the latter is always present as long as there is sufficient undergrowth), amakihi, and a few iiwi and creepers. This condition lasted for several miles, gradually koa appeared, began to dominate, then became the principal tree. The omau appeared and increased in numbers until it was very common; three or more birds were always within hearing. Just after entering the koa forest, I heard an o-u sing, but had no time to stalk it as the others were getting farther and farther away.

Not long after entering the koa forest the akiapolaau was heard, but not as many as on the July 2 trip; omau and creepers were in great number, being the most common birds in this forest. The akepiuie were not as numerous here as at Keawewai.

We had some difficulty in keeping to the trail...climbed a tree...to find that the cone was directly alongside...finally confronted the cone. As I climbed up the sides I looked out over the koa forests to Lalaau, and to the right of that cone to Mauna Loa, which rose gradually to its rounded summit. Progressed through a thick tangle of ferns and akala, which has thorny limbs that have a disagreeable habit of sticking into one. The flattened summit was open, covered with grass, dandelions, and an occasional thistle. From the top I looked for miles, down the forested and gradual slopes to Hilo and the coastline marked with its white line, the lower slopes of Mauna Kea - the top, unfortunately, covered with clouds - and Mauna Loa. To the northeast, the koa forest disappeared, and a dense ohia forest stretched away for miles toward Hilo and the Wailuku River. It beckoned to me, promising the sight of birds, perhaps the rare o-o or mamo?

Returning along the east slope was longer. We struck out across the plain, over a trail constructed by C.C.C. boys, under Mr. Mackensie, going at a fast clip so as to get home before dark. Too fast for noticing birds; however, I did hear two o-u start singing. The first sang long and sweetly, its song reminding me of the canary, though far sweeter.

July 17: A trip to the Forester's Kau forest camp was planned but called off, unfortunately. And so we missed a trip into a region practically unknown today in regard to birds, a region of excellent forest, probably a perfect sanctuary for birds such as the koa finch, Chloridops, and the akialoa; oo and mamo perhaps in the dense forests of the lower areas.

July 18: Chanced to meet Mr. and Mrs. Nicholson who told me of a Mr. Payne's seeing nene many times along the proposed route for a road from Hilo to Kona (which he is surveying). I told Mr. Lamb of it and proposed an expedition to Humuula.

July 19: This morning prepared for our expedition up the side of Mauna Loa to hunt for the rare nene. Surprised to hear an iiwi outside the cottage, in a clump of ohia next to the house. I whistled and soon saw it preening its feathers; a young bird. I also saw a creeper in the center of another tree nearby. This adds up to five native birds seen around camp.

Talked with Mr. Wingate. As to Kau, it will be safer to go up the mountain from the Kau side. I can do that later.

Walking along, I was surprised to hear two iiwi calling back and forth to each other in the dense ohia below the road. One burst into its song of harsh, grating, rusty, yet sweet notes. I whistled to an elepaio down the slope and it soon appeared, a beautiful male. It stayed in an ohia and worked carefully over the limbs and foliage for insects, now and then darting out swiftly after a tiny insect which it had dislodged,

snapping it up with its beak while it hung in the air. An amakihi passed through the tree and moved rapidly about for food.

Presently Mr. Christ came by and took me back to camp. Piled in everything and drove up Mauna Loa to the end of the truck road where we pitched our tent. We have just finished a smacking good dinner of abalone stew and I am now writing by the light of the carbide lamp. There was a beautiful sunset. The afterglow tinted a sea of clouds that slept on the soft, green bed of Olaa, with delicate hues of pink and lavender. The atmosphere above was a soft orange, fading gradually to a cool, deep blue. At night the clouds gleamed, luscious, silvery white in the liquid light of the moon. My toes are beginning to feel chilly. A couple of linnets, a creeper, and an amakihi slumber in the trees above us.

July 20: While eating breakfast I heard an akiapolaau somewhere in the grove, and later saw a bird fly into a koa nearby. It gave the warbling call of the akiapolaau. We could not find it.

Started our nene hunt, going south, over the slope of the mountain, along a trail to the gate, then out over the lava to a bench mark. Resting on the way in a small stand of ohia I noticed the small number of plants in the area: two grasses, a moss, a lichen, two ferns, the ohia, Coprosma, mamani, a-alii, pukeawe, and two other plants. These seem to comprise the flora of this and many other regions on this mountain. From the bench mark there was a grand sweeping view of the whole east slope of the mountain spread before us, to Honuapo and beyond, along past Punaluu, and the green canefields of Pahala, over Kilauea, Puna, with the distant shore, Kulani, and finally 6000 feet of Mauna Loa back of us - miles and miles of landscape.

We proceeded south across barren pahoehoe, then across an aa flow and finally into the kipuka Kaunaiu, covered with the usual scattering of ohia and the usual undergrowth. It was mostly silent, but occasionally the "tsee" of the amakihi was heard. The rattling song of an omau surprised me - the last bird I would have expected in such a place. It flew above our heads and into a tree, pouring forth loud melody, unusually sweet. Its mate flew off down the slope.

I made off toward the 1881 flow, which appeared as a river of black rock ahead, staying within the kipuka. Birds were exceedingly scarce, but there were two adults and two young iiwi in the only flowering ohia on the slope thereabouts. I watched them for sometime as they sipped nectar from the blossoms, the old birds continually chasing off the younger. They also chased away all the amakihi that came to the tree from time to time, but did not seem to bother the apapane.

The route descended a fairly steep slope now, and patches of koa were beginning to appear. The country became grassland, but with many pukeawe. I scented goat, looked down, and saw a small herd grazing just below. Using the wind and pukeawe bushes for shield, I managed to get very close. One chanced to glance my way, however, informed the herd and they fled.

I followed the remnants of a road for a distance, through scattered koa groves. Then, facing Mauna Loa road, I started off across country, over a bit of aa and then dropped into a kipuka of mixed koa, ohia and mamani. Birds were numerous here: iiwi, amakihi, creepers, and apapane; an akiapolaau. Crossing another stretch of aa, I passed through another grassy kipuka with patches of koa and mamani. Birds were not common; I saw the first elepaio. Another lava flow, on which grew a stand of large ohia which rang with the notes of apapane and iiwi, and my path led through a koa forest with an undergrowth of mamani and a grass-covered floor. This was devoid of birds. I came out onto the road, within sight of Cache No. 2, from which I obtained a refreshing draught of water. On the way up to the tent, I heard an elepaio. I whistled, saw it move, and it sailed down toward me and perched in a tree not far away. Continued whistling brought it nearer, until it was less than six feet away.

To be continued

March field trip: Poamoho was the trail chosen and a report by our president, in the Honolulu Star-Bulletin of April 21st, 1951, will be re-issued here.

No matter where the Hawaii Audubon Society has planned to go on its monthly bird hike, the slightest excuse sends us scurrying to Poamoho trail, north of Wahiawa, in the Koolau range. For it is here that we hear and hope to see the famous "mystery bird" of Poamoho.

I have written before of the first time it was seen, back in 1947, when the writer and three others saw some 20 of these elusive babblers in the valley at our feet. Since then they were seen sporadically until April of 1949, when my partner naturalist and I saw them again for a good look at a distance of about 25 feet.

Descriptions of the bird were sent to the Smithsonian in the hope that they could furnish a positive identification, but they replied that a skin in the hand was worth, etc., and the bird has kept very carefully out of sight since.

Two weeks ago, the society made its April junket to this trail. As usual, the high, clear, flute-like call of the bird was heard in several places. As usual, it was difficult to convince guests, along for the first time, that the call was that of a bird and not a human being.

Although the sound is loud and clear (apparently carrying for a half mile or more), a moment's reflection will serve to convince the listener that no human being can whistle two notes simultaneously, for the call sounds like a double-tone played on a flute - another impossibility.

That the bird is a member of the family of babbling thrushes (*Garrulax*) seems to be generally accepted. Beyond that, no one knows. Perhaps that mystery adds something to the appeal of Poamoho trail.

H. Paul Porter

MAY ACTIVITIES:

FIELD TRIP: Sunday, May 13, 1951, to Poamoho. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 8:00 am. Bring lunch, water, and car (if possible). Since Poamoho is one of the best birding trails on Oahu, we'll plan to go there until the rainy weather sets in.

MEETING: Monday, May 21, 1951, Auditorium, Library of Hawaii, at 7:30 pm. Mrs. Francis Evans will show slides to illustrate her talk on her recent trip to the Latin American Countries.

HAWAII AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS:

President:	Mr. H. Paul Porter
Vice-Presidents:	Miss Evelynne Johnson
	Mr. George C. Munro
Secretary:	Miss Grenville Hatch
Treasurer:	Miss Catherine Delamere
Editor, Elepaio:	Miss Margaret Titcomb
Address all mail to:	P.O. Box 5032, Honolulu 14, Hawaii

Dues for 1951 are now payable:

Regular - \$2.00 per annum.	Junior (18 years and under) - \$1.00 per annum.
	Life - \$50.00.