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AT THE NEST OF THE BLACK-TAILED GULL By Chester Fennell

Part II

The rocks were slippery and slimy from seaweed as we stepped from the boat and we had to watch each foothold carefully lest we should fall and slide most undecorously into the water. The climb to the top of the island, a total height of approximately 200 feet, led up a steep slippery draw of limestone vertically fractured into small blocks but well polished and quite solid. The only vegetation that I observed on the island consisted of a few small tufts of short grass springing out of the cracks in the rock and a thick carpet of low yellowish-green-leafed juicy sedum. This sedum the gulls used extensively in the construction of their nests, working it in with the dry rice and wheat straw which they carried over from the mainland. Nearly every nest we observed had at least some of this fresh succulent incorporated into its structure.

The gulls rose in droves upon our approach and wheeled screaming and crying close over our heads. Now we knew well why the Japanese call this species *umi-neko* or sea-cat for the din about us sounded like nothing more than hundreds of domestic felines all turned loose into one small area and chorusing at the top of their lungs. It was a strange eerie experience under that wan, heavily shrouded moon, and I fell far behind my companions just to stand alone on the edge of the cliff gazing far out over the mystic sea and allowing the power of this island realm to seize me as it would. Some three hundred miles before me directly to the west across the mill-pond placidity of the Japan Sea lay Pusan, Korea, where, incredibly now it appeared to me, I had actually lived for seven months. It all seemed like some huge wondrous dream, and I let my thoughts wander back to my childhood days when on our small, infertile farm in Ohio I used to lie in the grass under the gossiping cottonwoods on hot summer days watching the clouds overhead and dreaming of just such strange, far-flung foreign shores I should someday like to visit. Was this still a part of that childhood fantasy and were all these phantom shapes tossing and screaming about me only feathered spirits of my wildest imaginings? Surely, for several moments as I stood alone and lost on the very brink of this spirit world it all seemed to be but make-believe and quite intangible. With difficulty I wrenched myself back into reality and hurriedly turned to catch up with my companions.

Nests were scattered thickly and closely together all over the gently sloping summit of the island and only with the constant exercise of extreme care were we able to progress without stepping on them. Approximately half of the nests contained two eggs each while the other half held three. Only two nests were found with four eggs each, but it is our belief that the fourth egg was probably laid in that nest in error by a female other than the rightful owner. This often happens among other species which nest in such closely compact colonies and it's only a wonder to me that we did not find more of such abnormal sets in this particular colony. The eggs were extremely large for the size of the bird, even exceeding the proportions of a large hen's egg. They varied considerably in shade and markings, though for the most part were of a dull olive drab background with large irregular purplish-brown splotches. Frequently the background was of a rich bluish-green color, while

one of the Japanese boys drew Mr. Kobayashi's attention to a set of three wholly unmarked and of a delicate light blue shade.

The nests, as mentioned above, were constructed of dry rice or wheat straw and green sedum with an occasional feather worked into the lining. The outside diameter across the top varied from 19 to 40 cm. while the incubation bed ranged from 12 to 19 cm. across the top. Depth of the inner bowl ranged from 3 to 6 cm., and the height of nests located on more or less level spots averaged approximately 8 cm. Altogether we estimated a total of some six hundred nests; at two breeding birds to the nest a fairly close estimate of 1200 birds in the whole colony was obtained. Interestingly enough, all but one of these were in full adult plumage and that particular lone individual was not observed on the breeding site itself but only in flight around the base of the rock. This is almost conclusive proof that this species does not breed before it attains the full adult plumage which ordinarily takes three years among the laridae. But where all the immature birds hang out meanwhile is the question I should like to answer some day. Do they form flocks of their own and frequent the more northern coasts in search of food and freedom from domestic cares or do they scatter out singly and wander the wide briny wastes of the north-west Pacific. This is a problem that only extensive banding will probably solve. Surely I wish Okyojima were not quite so far from Kyoto for I'd certainly like to perform a little research along that line.

Throughout the night from between the warm covers of our futon we heard the high-pitched mewing of the colony, and bright and early the following morning we pushed off for a more thorough daylight inspection and to take color shots of both birds and nests. The weather was none too favorable for color film, but by shooting down on the birds and thus avoiding the dull leaden sky, results were quite satisfactory. The birds were most obliging subjects and permitted us to approach them while on the nest till within five or six feet. With this cooperativeness we were able to procure an excellent photographic record of the species while in the midst of its domestic duties. However, not a single downy young was yet to be found so that the juvenal stage of the bird could not be covered.

Quite satisfied with our efforts on the gulls we descended into the waiting skiffs and slowly worked our way around the base of the rock. Upon noting several house martins flying in and out of a large cave-like aperture in the rock, we pulled up to its entrance and discovered some eighteen nests of this species cemented up against the high arched ceiling. The majority were far beyond our reach, however, so that we were unable to examine their contents. After having found this same species nesting in cliffs near the summit of the 8500 foot active volcano Yake-dake in the Japanese Alps last year and in cliffs above the 11,000 foot elevation on Mt. Fuji the year before, I suddenly began to realize the tremendous range that this little feather-toed master of the air covers. Only the hardy little bush warbler runs it a close second in range of distribution.

As we proceeded around the more rugged vertical western side of the island we noticed a large jet black bird fly up into the recesses of a high, arched-over opening in the rocks. I at once exclaimed "Heron of some sort?" but acknowledged correction when Mr. Kobayashi said the word "U!" (cormorant). Upon second thought it was a mighty peculiar place for any heron, and I believed that my powers of first snap judgment must have been playing tricks on me again. However, the wing action appeared much too slow for any cormorant and a huge doubt began to take shape in the back of my mind. Suddenly, two more of the same birds flew over the boat, one with a large stick in its bill, and disappeared into the upper reaches of a high vertical chimney cut into the southern side of the island. Then Kobayashi corrected himself with such excitement and vigor that he almost fell overboard for they were herons - the black form of the Eastern reef heron (*Demigretta sacra ringeri*). Cautiously and slowly we worked the small boat into the narrow passage between the steep rock walls towards the base of the vaulted opening. When we were still within approxi-

ately fifty feet of the entrance four of the birds flew out from ledges high up under the ceiling of the rocky room and presented us with one of the greatest thrills possible to any bird lover. Through our field glasses we could easily make out the large protruding framework of at least one nest and wondered just how many in all the lofty crevice held. A more secure, inaccessible eyrie is difficult to imagine, and only the ropes, pitons and techniques of a well-experienced rock climbing party could possibly attain its level. We remained standing in the boat for several moments after just gazing upward at the retreat with mouths agape and sort of worshipping at the shrine of such rare beauty. Upon our return to Hinomisaki we inquired as to whether any of the residents of the village had ever observed or reported the bird's presence before, but all seemed ignorant of the species. So that in addition to the thrills of just having observed the bird, we also added the distinction of having observed and reported it for the very first time in this particular area. On top of that nesting record was also a first from this district. Before our departure that afternoon we again called upon the high priest to thank him for the privilege of visiting the island and added no small degree of pleasure to this strict life of routine by reporting our rare discovery. He was overjoyed at the news and no doubt in the future will guard more zealously than ever the security of the sanctuary--at least, so we hope.

Upon leaving the seacoast we headed in a general northeast direction and late that same afternoon arrived at Daisen-mura, a little town at the base of Mt. Daisen, a 6700 foot dormant volcano and the highest point of elevation in western Honshu. Mr. Kobayashi had visited the mountain the previous summer and several times before the war and declared that it possessed one of the most interesting zones of flora and fauna in all Japan. Because of its relatively high elevation and proximity to the Japan Sea (a shallow body of water which fails to exert any appreciable moderation of temperature upon adjacent land masses as does the Pacific Ocean), many species of flowers, trees, insects and birds are found here which otherwise attain their southern limit in Japan around the base of Mt. Fuji, some four hundred miles to the northeast.

At Daisen-mura we stopped to pick up a friend of Mr. Kobayashi, Masawi Sugitani by name, who was, also, a keen observer of wildlife and possessed a most thorough knowledge of the Daisen district. From his home we turned onto a narrow little dirt road which at first gradually and then more precipitously climbed the lower slopes of the huge volcanic cone. Darkness had already descended, and as we slowly wound our way up the heavily forested mountain slope a cold, strong wind sweeping down from off the summit lashed the trees ahead of us into grotesque, wildly dancing forms. Once in the path of the headlights a fox momentarily halted to glare at us with fiery eyes and then hastily slipped from sight into the underbrush alongside of the road. Often the jeep choked and sputtered its reluctance as the ruts of the path grew deeper and deeper and the degree of pitch increased, but it valiantly held out and finally deposited us in front of the Yama No Ie or Mountain House at the 2600 foot elevation. The wind was blowing at gale proportions at this elevation and howled and whined around the gables of the steeply ridged, two-story frame structure. The canvas top of the jeep beat a veritable tattoo against its supporting rods and the surrounding pines and firs bowed and doubled over fitfully in obeisance to the storm god.

At first appearance the hotel seemed to be dark and deserted but repeated hammerings on both back and front doors and sustained blowing of the jeep's horn eventually brought forth life and lights. The hour was rather late, at least for mountain folks, and as we had not taken the precaution of calling ahead for reservations, our arrival was wholly unanticipated. The keeper soon made us feel welcome and promptly set about preparing a most welcome if belated supper.

To be continued.

OREOMYZA MACULATA IN HONOLULU

By George C. Munro

My experience with the birds of Oahu is very limited. When Rothschild's collector Mr. H. C. Palmer was on Oahu I was not with the expedition. However, I later talked with him about them and very much with Dr. R. C. L. Perkins on the same subject. The Oahu creeper (Oreomyza maculata) is a species I never saw in life. In the many miles of newly made CCC trails that I tramped during the bird survey in 1935 I failed to sight a single specimen. However, it has been reported since as not uncommon.

Regarding a report in the "Elepaio" of August 1946 that one was seen in the town of Honolulu, Perkins in October 1947 has the following to say: "In the August number of the Elepaio there is an extraordinary note by Priscilla M. Griffey. Can there be any error? I am very well acquainted with Oreomyza maculata and saw scores of this bird between 1892-1903. I first found it in the Waianae Mountains on the east side of the range when I was staying at the ranch house - formerly I believe the Emerson family lived there - which was near the place where later the 'Haliwea hotel' was built. On two or three occasions I tramped from there to that part of the east side of the Waianae range which is about opposite to Wahiawa of the Koolau range (that was a pretty hard day's work). It was common enough at about 1500 feet or rather more. I think I shot only one or two of the bird as in those early days I was only supposed to be supplementing Scott Wilson's collection at Cambridge and I knew he had obtained it in the Koolau range, as I myself also did later. I saw it abundantly in the forest at Wahiawa still later and finally about 1902-04 quite common in the Waianae Mts., in the neighbourhood of Haleauau.

"In all the work I did in the Mts. near Honolulu off and on from 1892-1912 ranging from Waialae to Kalihi I never saw (nor heard a sound of) this bird. Nowhere in the various localities where I found it did I ever hear it sing. Sam Wilder who shot one or two on one occasion when with me called them 'chippies' (a very good name) from the only sound I ever heard them utter. Of all the many I saw only two or three were yellow birds. I presume the one figured in the 'Fauna H.' is one I must have sent to Cambridge. This figure seems to agree generally with the description in 'Elepaio,' though I should hardly call the wings 'brown.' It is very remarkable that this rare form of the male and with 'a sweet song,' such as I never heard, should occur in Honolulu even as a stray. I presume Townsend got his specimens in Nuuanu Valley, when, in company with Deppe, he collected there in 1836, or about 10 years later than when Bloxam collected there. I am presuming that the latter's 'Fringilla sandwichensis' placed next to his Fringilla rufa (Loxops rufa), is Oreomyza maculata, as he distinguished it by the character 'tongue at extremity bifid.' Some might think that this would warrant the sinking of the name maculata! Curiously in his final catalogue of the species and specimens collected, Bloxam leaves out this Fringilla sandwichensis altogether, though before he had listed both sexes. Also to this alone of the Passerine birds of Oahu he gives no native name. Scott Wilson had no yellow-plumaged male, but he described this form from one of Townsend's specimens lent to him from the Philadelphia museum. The remark that the males were not usually colored like this was from my information as he himself collected only a few immature birds."

On May 11, 1948, Perkins wrote me: "As to Miss Griffey's record of Oreomyza in Honolulu of course it probably could only have been a stray, blown in some gale to the lowlands from either the Koolau range N.W. of Nuuanu Valley or from the Waianae range. My brief experience of birds blown out of the mountains as occurred on Molo-kai (and elsewhere by hearsay) was that even strong birds like Iiwi and Apapane were picked up dead very soon, without regaining the forest. At any rate it cannot be said that her record is impossible. One thing is practically certain, the Oreomyza did not exist in the mountains near Honolulu from 1892-1912 as I was too frequently collecting there, to ever miss seeing or hearing it."

LETTERS AND NOTES

Oahu, T.H.: A number of reports on exotics have been received lately. Word has come to Mrs. A. Castle from several sources that the Oruri-cho, or Japanese blue flycatcher, Muscicapa cyanomelana Temminck, has been observed both at Pearl Harbor and at Kahala. So far this introduction seems to be staying in the lowlands - a trait highly commendable.

Another exotic has been seen by Mrs. Castle in her Nuuanu garden, and apparently in Makiki, according to the description. Mrs. Castle is not sure of the species but says it resembles a hummingbird. This may be the sun bird, which is the only introduction I have found which is said to resemble the hummingbird.

The bunting (*Passerina leclancheri*) has been mentioned before as breeding in Manoa. It continues to be reported from various areas, including those not far from Kaneohe.

Mr. Thomas McGuire brings word of the Dyal, or Dayal bird, having seen and heard it in upper Manoa, and heard its call which he likens to a "cowboy's whistle" at Palehua. Mr. McGuire also says that the *Liothrix* has taken over the trees at his Puunui home, at least twenty having built nests there this year. However, as in some other districts, the birds appear seasonally. We need many more observers in all districts on the *Liothrix*, to obtain definite information on its movements. Does this yearly migration constitute the first step toward permanent residence in the lowlands? Mrs. Blanche Pedley, now living in Woodlawn, finds her guava trees full of *Liothrix* all day, and reports that they are friendly and unsuspicious, quite unlike the shy, wary bird we try to see on the trails.

Lorin Gill has reported the Shama thrush on Tantalus, at intervals for several years. And, of course, we need not recall our famous *Garrulax* (?) on Poamoho trail.

Reports on exotics may continue to increase. It seems entirely possible that other species not known to be breeding may be found. Careful notes should be made by all who have an opportunity to watch these birds, to compose as complete a picture as possible of their adaptation and effect on Hawaii. - G. Hatch.

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Kyoto, Japan, June 16, 1950: Kobayashi and Col. Wolfe spent a week's birding up around the base of Mt. Fuji the last week in May. Despite daily rains they found nests of the Asiatic sparrowhawk, Japanese buzzard, brown thrush, yellow bunting and - best of all - the Latham's snipe. Col. Wolfe found the last named species fairly abundant in Hokkaido last summer but try as he would was unable to locate its nest. So he was particularly overjoyed to run across it at Fuji-san. Strangely enough it was in the high grass on fairly dry ground rather than around close to the marshy areas where he had normally expected to find it.

The shorebird migration has finally drawn to an end and what a rare season it was! Kobayashi and I spent every weekend on mud flats along the shore of Osaka Bay from the first of January through the fourth of June so that we have a pretty complete, thorough idea of arrival and departure dates on all the transient species. The majority of species were wholly new to me and at least one of them, the Geoffrey's sand plover, even Kobayashi had never before seen in the field. Many times, during the height of the movement, we arrived on the mud flats early in the morning before anyone else had had a chance to frighten them and had the great joy of observing hundreds and hundreds of little stint, dunlin, E. whimbrels, gray plover, Stegmann's Mongolian plover, E. bar-tailed godwit, Indian curlew, Terek sandpiper, turnstone, northern phalarope and great knot all busily feeding on and along the edge of the tidal pools. Every now and then huge flocks would suddenly take wing, for no apparent reason, swiftly writhe and twist in the air above like a single

body possessed and then dive down to land in the very same spot and resume feeding as though nothing had ever happened. Who can say what these mad, fantastic aerial gyrations mean to the performers? What is the given signal? What is their means of maintaining such close, compact flight formation and perfect unity of coordination?

The first flocks to appear were extremely shy and difficult to approach but as the migration progressed they became increasingly trustful till we were finally taking pictures of the stint and dunlin from behind grass-topped dykes at a range of approximately twenty feet. The whimbrel and godwit, however, maintained strict aloofness and refused close scrutiny throughout the passage. The phalaropes, on the other hand, were the most confiding of all and permitted us to approach within exceedingly close range while they continued their busy head-nodding, dervish-like pursuit of tiny surface insects. They congregated on the surface of the shallow ponds in groups of five to forty and appeared to be in all phases of transition plumage while not a few were already in their full red, gray and white dapper breeding dress. These little mites with the needle-like bills, along with the plovers have completely won my heart, and took me back to days in San Francisco where I first observed this same species wintering on the little artificial lakes scattered throughout Golden Gate Park. - Chester Fennell.

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NOVEMBER ACTIVITIES:

FIELD TRIP: November 12th, to Kalena in the Waianae back of Schofield, if a permit from the Army can be obtained. If permission is refused, the group will take the Manoa Cliffs trail. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 8:00 AM bringing lunch (and car if possible). Inasmuch as the Kalena trail is usually very rewarding it is to be hoped we may make that trip for the first time in 1950.

MEETING: November 20th, Auditorium, Library of Hawaii, at 7:30 P.M.

Mr. Ray H. Greenfield, associated here with the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, will show his movies of humming birds taken at a southern California bird sanctuary, as well as other bird pictures taken in Mexico. The program promises to be very entertaining, so come and bring your friends.

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