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FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH HAWAIIAN SONGBIRDS

By Charles Hartshorne

One awakes to the sound of the Myna, an introduced species which in all open inhabited places is now the commonest bird, with the possible exception of passer domesticus. The Myna has a loud, mostly harsh, but partly somewhat sweet song, and its behavior is interesting. It walks, runs and hops (all three!) about, usually in pairs and these appear to engage at times in noisy territorial disputes with one or more other pairs. Instead of flying up when cars approach, the Myna merely runs and hops a few steps aside to allow the car to pass - just in time.

Before long two other species are added to the new observer's list. These are the North American or Kentucky Cardinal, and the Mejiro(white-eye). The Cardinal, with its brilliant, loud song is prominent everywhere, except in the deep woods, and according to my impression, even there at times. Its song is the same as on the continent except that apparently (and unless two residents, one an experienced observer, were in error as to which species was singing) some individuals have added two phrases from the song, much more limited in variety, and softer, of the Brazilian Cardinal, which is also fairly common on Oahu. These two phrases are almost the entire song of the South American species, so far as I could observe or could learn from resident observers, and sound like "sh'wee-sh'wa, sh'wee-sh'wa", an upward followed by a downward slur, the whole once repeated. I have never heard anything like this from a cardinal on the mainland. Apparently the species is in process of extending its repertoire slightly by imitating a part of the song of the related species. (This needs further checking, I think.) The two forms, which have slight visual resemblance, since the Brazilian is gray and white, frequently occur close together.

The White-eye is widely distributed, both in the cities and in the forests. It sings a high-pitched, sweet but somewhat twangy, rather formless song, a fairly prolonged series of notes nearly on the same pitch, with an accent (or slight rise of pitch?) every few notes - a feature which does not recall any song known to me. The whitish eye is fairly conspicuous, and the neat, plain green garb is obvious when the bird exposes its back to view. The White-eye is though by some to be a serious threat to native birds because of its wide distribution and adaptability. Certainly it must intensify competition for food, if not for nesting sites.

So far we have mentioned only introduced song-birds, which are indeed about all that are met in the towns. The indigenous species most likely to be noted in one's first explorations into the country is the Elepaio, a flycatching, wren-like, rather loudly whistling and scolding little creature. The wren-likeness consists in the cocking of the tail, and also in a habit of constant motion, short little flights from twig to twig, like a North American Warbler. My wife reported she had seen what appeared to be a wren in a tall tree, and later I realized she must have seen her first Elepaio. The song resembles somewhat that of certain tyrant flycatchers of the mainland, a loud whee-wheeh, startling in its emphasis if it comes from nearby. The bird also announces its presence with a variety of call notes.

Alas, the Elopeio is the only native songbird that is commonly met with, apart from certain sports in the deep woods. But several fine introduced species are fairly common away from the towns. The most notable of these which I have heard are two, the Japanese Bush Warbler and the so-called Pekin Nightingale (not a nightingale), also called the Japanese Hill Robin, though it is not Japanese or a robin, being a Babbling Thrush (order Timeliidae) from Southern Asia. These delightful songsters would grace any country. I heard the Bushwarbler but once and failed to see the singer. Yet after discussing the song with a keen observer of long experience in the islands, and reading several books in which the song is described I cannot doubt the identification. One hears a mysterious, exceptionally low pitched note, repeated or prolonged with a curious rolling effect, followed by a couple of musical phrases much higher in pitch (octaves higher, as it seemed to me). Sometimes the song begins with the high notes and the low-pitched one is then added, followed again by the high finale. The low note is unique among songs known to me, being actually low enough to make one think of an owl, though it is more musical. There is only one song that I know of which offers the dramatic contrast of this one, and that is the nightingale's with its joyful jug-jug notes and its thin, drawn-out plaintive ones. But in the Bush Warbler's utterance there seemed to me to be no sadness, but only mystery and delightful surprise. Since I did not see the singer, how do I know what it was? For days I did not. But then I was told by Miss Grenville Hatch that the Bush Warbler had some exceptionally low-pitched notes, and that it was considered one of the good singers in the islands. Also I was able to exclude the only bird I had seen at the time of the singing, a Pekin Nightingale, by learning to know its entirely different mode of singing. This narrowed the possibilities. Further, among the "good singers", the Chinese Thrush is said by several authorities to sing very much like the Pekin Nightingale, so it could be excluded. Then I recalled that Northwood says the Bush Warbler's song begins with a "thrilling low note" followed by "teeter, teeter", dying away at the end. Now true, I did not quite detect the "teeter, teeter", but the thrillingness and lowness of the opening note was exactly what I had experienced and the vowel and consonant sounds of "teeter" are at any rate high-pitched, so that basically the structure of the song I heard, precisely in what was most distinctive about it, was furnished by the description. Somewhat later conclusive evidence came when I learned that the Japanese consider the bird one of their best singers and that they render its song "Ho-ho ho-kekkyo". The three "ho's" by the low pitch of the vowel and the lack of sharp consonants again indicated the very low pitch and also the repetitious or rolling effect; while the "k's" and "e" are high-pitched.

The Pekin Nightingale, which I heard repeatedly, in several places (possibly in some instances confusing it with the Chinese Thrush, said now to be rare), and saw singing, is a charming soloist. Here is not sharp contrast of any kind, but a wonderfully sweet voice, exquisitely modulated and varied up and down the scale over rather small or moderate intervals, and always fairly high, nothing like "ho-ho" ever appearing. Each song unit lasts about as long as the song of the Rose-breasted or Black-headed Grosbeak of the mainland, but there is considerably more variety from one unit to the next. The voice has all the sugary sweetness of the Grosbeak's but is more musical. The song is also a bit more deliberate than the Grosbeak's, in this being more like the Scarlet Tanager's. It does not move up or down the scale, but simply varies refreshingly and gently, in pitch.

At times a half dozen birds sang at once on the mountain side of Tantalus, back of Honolulu. (I am very grateful to Mr. Charles Dunn for introducing me to this most beautiful spot, which I visited twice). I saw several individuals, easily identifiable with their red beaks and small size (thus ruling out the very different appearing Chinese Thrush, the only other possibility), one of them singing as I watched it...another observer found, as I did, that this mountain side contains many Pekin Nightingales but few, if any, Chinese Thrushes. Never-the-less, still another observer held that the songs were mostly coming from the latter bird. If that is

true, then the two species sing more alike than any two species which are otherwise so divergent. In any case the description I have given cannot be essentially incorrect of the bird I saw repeatedly.

The two songs just described, Bush Warbler's and "Nightingale"'s, are very fine songs. These are introduced birds, and alas it is not easy to hear much else but introduced birds on Oahu. In the wilder portions of the island and even more on Hawaii (one is told), occurs the Apapane, a lovely honeysucking creature of red and black that haunts the flowering trees. If its song had more variety and complexity it would rival that of any bird. Rightly does one term its notes "flute-like" and say of them that they are always sweet. The opening notes of the song have a brilliant liveliness, something like that of the western meadowlark (established in a few places on the island) and giving a similar impression of magical joy. The song, however, closes with a somewhat lower pitched note rapidly repeated in what one observer calls a musical chuckle. This chuckle gives the effect, not of humor, but of sweet joyousness, honeyed delight. The combination of meadowlark-like musical gymnastics with the simple repetitive finale makes the song sharply distinctive, impossible to confuse with any other. But alas, it is said that the bird just repeats the pattern over and over. Observers seem to agree that there is no repertoire of widely different songs at the command of each individual bird, as with the meadowlark or song sparrow of the continent. However, when many individuals sing at once, as is said to occur often, there is enough diversity between them to produce a chorus rich in beauty, since in tonal quality the bird leaves nothing to be desired. But because of the monotony one cannot class it with the superlative avian musicians. It should be said that the foregoing description is based entirely on a tape-recording made by Mr. William Ward of the Bank of Hawaii, who has achieved excellent results with an ordinary machine. Mr. Ward says the quality of the song is not done full justice by the recording. My feeling, however, was that in mere tone quality nothing could be much better.

The original thrush of the islands was said to sing very well, and it may still be possible to hear it on some of them. A song one often hears is the sweet happy rolling notes of the "linnet" or California House Finch. It is less common than the White Eye, but is well established, and it has the merit of appearing in places in cities where otherwise there might be no bird music worth mentioning, or perhaps at most the song of the Cardinal and no other. On the grounds of the Kamehameha Schools back of Honolulu I heard the unmistakable gushing song of the mocking-bird (*Polyglottus*). When I made out the singer, he was observing me narrowly, and he continued to do so for some time. Never-the-less he could not have been thinking that I had a familiar air, as having just come from the land of his ancestors!

The far-famed Shama of India, supposed to be established on Kauai Island, and sometimes reported from Oahu, I was not lucky enough to hear or see. No one seems to have investigated the status of this bird on Kauai.

There is pathos in the absence, in most parts of the islands, of even those native birds which have survived extinction and, for the immediate future at least, appear safe. Nor are the introduced birds as yet numerous enough to make the region appear abundant in bird life. Still, as my account may suggest, many beautiful avian voices can be heard, and the fact that they are drawn from most major parts of the world makes this a unique wild zoo as it were, of creatures endowed with the two gifts of music and flight.

(Besides my indebtedness to the persons mentioned in the above, I wish to acknowledge that to Mr. Paul Porter. Without their aid my week in the Islands would have taught me little about the songbirds of the region. They have given me treasure for a lifetime. CH)

REPORT ON THE AUKU. The auku, or black-crowned night-heron, is a local inhabitant (Judd street, Honolulu), but for several weeks they have not been here. They fly down towards the sea at night-fall, and squawk, especially if I am running water.

They seem to answer me when I call back. During the war we timed our black-out time by the auku. In cloudy weather they fly much lower, but on April 11th, when I was watching for them they were not to be seen or heard. I don't think they ever sing, but one night a few months ago a party held at a swimming pool in a neighbor's garden evidently disturbed them, for they were squawking and seemed to be circling the pool as late as 1:00 a.m. I concluded that they nested in the tamarind tree in that garden. For a year and a half the little stream nearby was dried up during construction work, and the auku were never seen while the stream was dry. However, they returned with the water. They are usually the last to call at night and the first in the morning.

Alice M. Macintosh.

ROBERT R. SHEEHAN, writing from Midway to George C. Munro, says: "...The weather here at Midway has been exceptionally warm this winter. It may be for this reason that our birds are returning to the nesting grounds earlier this season than last. The Sooty Terns began arriving 25 February and they are still (18 March) flying in a circular pattern making an unearthly din. They were observed landing for the first time 17 March, but they were up and away in a few minutes. Last year they didn't appear until 1 April. The Pacific Golden Plover is taking on its summer coat. The Red-tailed Tropicbirds began to arrive 26 February, some three weeks earlier than last year. They are now beginning to nest, but no eggs have yet been reported. The Wedge-tailed Shearwater commenced arriving 15 March, and they were heard making their eerie call the night of 16 March. Finally managed to work out the incubation period on the Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses. The Blackfoot on 25 eggs average 65.2 days. The Laysan on 32 eggs average 64.5 days.

THE DAWN WATCH, April 13th

It will be most interesting to read the full report of a project of Noble Rollin of the Bird Research Station at Glanton, Northumberland, England, who undertook a cooperative world-wide recording by ornithologists and mere lowly bird-lovers of first calls and songs at dawn on Easter Sunday. A letter from Mr. Rollin reached us two days before April 13th, too late for a special meeting to be called, but the telephone was useful and some reports were made by Hawaii Audubon Society members. Thanks are due to our two newspapers, the Honolulu Star-Bulletin and the Honolulu Advertiser, who heard from Mr. Rollin independently and told him of our society. The Star-Bulletin published a report of the bird-listening on April 14th. Mr. Charles Dunn, an Auduboner on the Star-Bulletin staff, assisted in the recordings. Perhaps other records will be sent in, as well as those recorded below. They will be welcome, no matter how late. Dusk recordings were also wanted, if possible, as well as last flight.

Time: Dawn occurred at 6:14; sunset at 6:50

Weather: Some rain intermittently light and heavy in the valleys and on the heights, graduating to none on the shores.

Reports:

Charles Dunn. Tantalus Drive; elevation 1000 feet; wind 20-22 mi. per hour; rain falling.

a.m. Calls at 5:17: Chinese Thrush; 5:28 Elepaio; 5:30 Mynah, Dove and Cardinal; 5:32 Pekin Nightingale; 5:34 Liothrix lutea. At 5:34 all were in song. 5:45: Cardinals strong in number.

Priscilla Harpham. Tantalus. Elevation 1350 feet; kept her ears open in the midst of absorbing duties and heard Elepaio first, at 6:00.

Edwin H. Bryan, jr. Manoa Valley, Tantalus side. About 500 feet elevation; sky overcast, light rain falling.

a.m. 5:30 shrill song of cardinal: Richmondia cardinalis Linn., "see-me, see-me, look-at-me, cheer, cheer." Soon after began the chanting of doves, the "call-a-ca, caw-caw-caw" of the little barred dove: Geopelia striata (Linn.) and the deeper note of the Chinese or lace-neck dove: Streptopelia chinensis (Scopoli). These throaty chants in time punctuated by the see-saw chatter in typical starling fashion by a pair of mynah birds: Acridotheres tristis (Linn.), safely out of the rain under the shelter of a roof.

Blanche Pedley. Woodlawn, far into Manoa Valley; about 200 feet elevation.

a.m. 5:43, 2 cardinals calling, also at 5:45; 5:47, mynah call; 5:48, cardinal calling frequently; 5:50, mynah, also at 5:52; 5:53, two linnets called and continued now and then; 6:04, cardinal singing; 6:04, white-eye. Heavy rain set in and only cardinals and linnets continued until 6:10 when a hill robin joined in. At 6:12 a Chinese dove; 6:13, white-eye and mynah; 6:15, two doves; 6:17, a mynah; 6:21, the rain came down heavily - no further music until it let up.

p.m. 6:50, Cardinal; 6:51, Cardinal and mynah; 6:52, mynah; 6:58, cardinal, 7:10, mynah.

Charlotta Hoskins. Upper Manoa Valley; elevation about 600 feet. Cloudy, cool.

a.m. 5:50, Kentucky cardinals calling, at least 6 individuals; 6:00, white-eyes too numerous to count, calling; 6:10, Kentucky cardinals, singing. Heavy downpour began at this time, no calls or songs heard again until late forenoon.

Grenville Hatch. Wilhelmina Rise. Elevation about 500 feet, wind NNE, 7 mi. per hr., with gusts of about 25 mi. per hr. Temperature 64°F.

a.m. 5:40 call, Kentucky cardinal; 5:48, sparrow; 6:04, mynah; 6:20, barred dove. Songs began about 5:41, with the cardinal; 5:50, sparrow; 5:52, white-eye, and 6:09, mynah.

Margaret Titcomb. Punchbowl. About 300 feet elevation; sky fairly clear, patches of light cloud.

a.m. 5:45, calls, Kentucky cardinal; 5:55, small birds twittering (young sparrows?), 6:04, doves; calls changed to songs about 6:00; 6:10, cardinal much reduced in volume, only two birds at any time; 6:11 onward, doves and small birds frequent.

p.m. 6:45, doves frequent; 6:46, mynah; 6:50, cardinal, song; doves continuing; mynah continuing; 6:55, twitterings; cardinal, a half song; doves continuing. 56, cardinal; 7:00, mynah (last sound of any bird). At 7:00, a last flight observed - a mynah.

Alice M. Macintosh. Judd street. Elevation about 60 feet.

p.m. 6:00. The mynah and Brazilian cardinal took turns both calling and singing; the Japanese white-eye kept up till it was almost too dark to see color in the sky. All the doves, and a few tame pigeons that are usually released at that hour to circle the neighborhood, had already ceased singing.

p.m. 6:10. A family of white-eyes, 2 parents and 2 or 3 young, flying about among the bushes, evidently teaching the young to fly. The latter were twittering excitedly and making fluttering, short flights, the parents singing and chirping vigorously in the meanwhile.

p.m. 6:35 White-eyes continued for about 10 minutes after the cardinal was quiet. Then the mynah seemed to be imitating the cardinal.

p.m. 6:50 Mynah the last to call - just once. (None of the usual settling bustle among the mynahs this evening!) Waited a long time, listening for the croak of the auku, or black-crowned night-heron, but for several weeks they have not flown over.

All of these observations were made in residential areas. To hear native Hawaiian birds one must go up to the hills into the native forest, about 1500 feet elevation. As Mr. Bryan said, "It requires a hardy bird-lover to be high on the mountain slopes at or before dawn on a drizzly Easter morning." However, it might be done another year if the result seemed to be worthwhile. It has been done frequently for the annual Christmas count.

All the birds recorded were introduced, except elopaio, which is friendly enough to come down a bit from the heights.

THE BIRDS OF MT. FUJI (cont'd) (As related by Keisuke Kobayashi to C. M. Fennell)

The fog and light rain suddenly turned into a heavy downpour and we hastily beat a retreat to the shelter of the hut at the First Station to again build a fire and dry our clothes. During moments of "open windows" through the fog and deluge surrounding us we could look down the slopes of the mountain towards Subashiri and see the sun shining at the lower levels. The scene beckoned us and we shortly left the hut to seek milder, more promising climes below.

On the way down we found the nest of a Narcissus Flycatcher within the large cavity of a dead tree stump and the hammock-like nest of a White-eye among bushes alongside the trail.

Subashiri was attained around five-thirty and, since there was still plenty of time before dark, we plunged into the surrounding wooded area to search for the nest of the Gray-headed Thrush.

We were extremely fortunate and, almost at once, found a nest situated approximately six feet above the ground on a branch of an oak tree, thickly overgrown with vines of Akobia quinata. One of the birds was brooding on the nest and, by stealthily crawling on my hands and knees, I was able to approach till within four feet. At that range the brooding bird, even though it crouched as low as possible within the nest, was easily and readily distinguished as the female.

The Gray-headed Thrush is almost identical in coloring and markings to the Brown Thrush, differing only by having a narrow, yellowish-white stripe above the eye. This superciliary mark is quite outstanding in the winter but in the summer plumage, particularly in the female, narrows considerably and is very difficult to discern in the field. However, at this close range, it was clearly visible and I had no doubt as to the identity of the bird.

The eggs of the Gray-headed Thrush are, also, nearly, if not wholly, identical with those of the Brown Thrush and quite impossible to tell apart unless observed attended by the adult birds themselves.

The brooding bird, in this case, finally flushed from the nest and we found it to contain three eggs of a very beautiful bluish-green ground color heavily spotted with reddish brown.

Upon awaking the following morning (28 May), we again found the mountain heavily enshrouded in fog and the forested slopes dripping and thoroughly soaked from a heavy rain which had fallen during the night. Because of these conditions we decided, rather than to venture into the heavy undergrowth higher up, to visit the nearby, more open, wooded area surrounding Sengen Shrine in order to hear the early matins of the feathered choristers.

The woods fairly rang with the calls and songs of the Narcissus Flycatcher, the Japanese Gray Thrush, the Japanese Great Tit, the Paradise Flycatcher, the Japanese Bush Warbler, the Davison's Ground Thrush, the Long-tailed Tit, the Varied Tit, Temminck's Crowned Willow Warbler, the White-eye, Pigmy Woodpecker, Willow Tit, Ashy Minivet, Brown Thrush, etc. Of the all, the vocalizations of the Davison's Ground Thrush was most outstanding with its clear, clarion-like, whistled "chob'o-o-o-o-ich'ii!" Just for fun and the record, I noted the number of calls by my watch and found them to total twenty-two in a single minute's time.

TO BE CONTINUED

PUPUKEA FIELD TRIP. On May 11th a small but determined group of bird watchers started for Pupukea. There were only two members, Miss Peterson and Mr. Norton, and three guests, Miss Horne, Mrs. Eastman and Sergeant Groner, but a wonderful though slightly damp trip was had by all.

Upon arriving at our destination we found that a National Guard unit had decided to hold maneuvers in the same area, so despite the "Proceed at your own risk" and "Live ammunition" signs posted along the roadway we started our little journey into the forest lands. A bit of comedy somewhat enlivened our walk when one of the guests, Mrs. Eastman, temporarily lost a shoe and floundered around in her nylons in the mud until rescued by Sgt. Groner. Miss Peterson wanted them to do it all over again so that she could get some pictures.

There were numerous white-eye along the trail and the Kentucky cardinal were very large in size and of a very brilliant color. They put on a wonderful performance flying from branch to branch and tree to tree.

If it were not for the rain that kept wetting us every now and then we would in all probability not have discovered an elepaio nest. It so happened that in trying to escape from a rather heavy shower we had paused in the shelter of some trees. Mrs. Eastman upon looking up into the tree saw the nest with an elepaio sitting in it. We were all surprised and pleased, and we must have caused a rather noisy commotion because the bird apparently became frightened and flew away.

After the rain had stopped a bit we decided to return to the road and eat lunch. While having lunch we were treated to a beautiful serenade by a very brilliant Kentucky cardinal.

The scarcity of various birds was due probably to the rains and the National Guard maneuvers, but I believe another trip at a later and more favorable time should be planned, because the Pupukea section is a very good birding area.

H. Maco Norton.

JUNE BIRD WALK: June 8. Meet at Library of Hawaii at 8:00 a.m. Destination to be determined by weather conditions.

JUNE MEETING: June 23. Meet at 7:30 p.m. at Bishop Museum Library. Use entrance from Kalihi street. Mr. Mace Norton in charge of discussion at this meeting.

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