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The Wandering Tattler
(Ulili: Heteroscalus incanus),
a resume, by Grenville Hatch

The tattler, which spends most of the year in Hawaii, belongs to the sandpiper family Scolopacidae, the same family in which are placed the curlew, the turnstone and the sanderling; in the same order, Charadriiformes, as the plover.

Description

Length: 11 inches

Winter plumage: gray above, whitish below; white line over eye; legs greenish yellow; bill long, straight and dark

Breeding plumage: the breast is barred and streaked with narrow, black lines; otherwise no change.

General discussion

The tattler breeds in the far north, and has never been known to nest in Hawaii, although some individuals spend the entire year here. For over one hundred years after the species was first described, its breeding place was unknown, but in 1923 the first nest was found on a sand bar of the Savage River, in northern Alaska. The nest is described as about five inches in diameter, well constructed, containing four eggs, greenish-gray in color, spotted with brown, mostly about the larger end.

After the breeding season is over, the birds migrate to the south. They may be found along the west coast of the United States, and they winter fairly generally throughout the Pacific area. In Hawaii, we may begin to look for them in middle or late August, as they come in company with flocks of plover and turnstone, usually only a few tattlers with each flock. Migration continues in this way, probably not completed until early winter. The first arrivals are often still in breeding plumage.

The tattler is usually found along the rocky shores, although at times it seeks food along the banks of streams far inland. It is a solitary bird, most often alone, sometimes in pairs, rarely in groups of ten or twelve. On the shore it follows the receding wave, picking up minute crustaceans left stranded. As the wave comes in, it retreats, and can be seen flitting from one rocky area to another,

often calling--a pleasant, fluty cry--as it goes. It is from this habit that both the common name and the Hawaiian name are derived. Ulili is the name of the Hawaiian bamboo flute; some claim that the name is an imitation of the call.

In April or May, the tattlers start the migration to the north, in company again with the plover, turnstone and sanderling, small numbers of tattlers joining the flocks. From our observations this year, we are inclined to think that the tattler is apt to leave later than the majority of the other shore birds. Many are in breeding plumage at the time of departure. Tattlers on islands farther west leave earlier, usually in March. The tattlers that summer in Hawaii are generally considered to be immature, or too weak to have the urge to make the long flight to the breeding grounds. These birds do not change to breeding plumage.

The tattler is not difficult to identify in the field. The only bird with which it might be confused in Hawaii is the plover, but the plover is golden brown, while the tattler is slate gray. It is similar to the lesser yellow legs, but that is such a rare bird here that it does not offer a problem in identification. The actions of the tattler offer the simplest means of identification. Its position is characteristic, the body apt to be on a horizontal plane, head level with the body, especially as it runs through the little pools in search of food. When disturbed, it almost always calls and the call is unmistakable.

Dry-land Plants in a Dry Season

By George C. Munro

After an extremely dry period there was nearly half an inch of rain at Na Laau Hawaii on September 30 and as we go into October there seems prospect of more. Physical disabilities on two occasions prevented watering the plants that had been set out and more of them died. They, however, gave us experience of their drought-resisting qualities and there is seed of all of them in the ground. The nursery-raised plants are not counted on to be permanent occupants of the location. But in an ordinary season there is a good chance of their survival. We hope they will during this coming wet season. By exploiting those that do well, especially if they are showy in foliage or flowers, support will be gained for the project. For instance, a short time ago, I received from Lanai a good supply of seed of the rare white bean and planted in the nursery some of the scarcely hardened seeds. They germinated at once and now, encouraged by the recent showers, I am setting out about a score of well-grown plants. By the time the heavy rains come, they will be climbing the kiawe trees that were killed with the 2, 4-D last summer. Each plant has a short section of bamboo carried to below its root so that it can be watered from below and its roots encouraged to go down to the subsoil to insure its stability. There was no kona storm last wet season and the subsoil was not soaked as it would be in a normal season. The bean of this variety I brought from Lanai in February, 1952, is now well up into the branches of an algeroba tree beside it, and I hope it will flower before long. I find that seed of these dryland plants often germinates readily if planted at once after ripening, whereas if thoroughly dried they may take years to germinate unless scarified before planting. A plant of the rare Breweria menziesi has pulled through the dry season very well. The drought killed a number of the alaweo plants that grew from broadcasted seed but a number survived and some are budding to flower. They were not watered but left to survive or perish. The plants of the wiliwili tree, the alaweo shrub and the awikiwiki bean have survived the last two exceptionally dry years, and the response of the native

kakonakona grass in the last peculiar wet season--with no kona storm and the dry month of December in the middle of it--gives great hopes for the ultimate success of Na Laau Hawaii.

October 19th, 1953

AUDUBON SCREEN TOURS

It is a pleasure to report that the second movie: CANADA WEST, by Bert Harwell, was received with great enthusiasm. Our regret is that some wishing to see it had to be turned away, for the hall was sold out. We fear that the third may have the same fate. But, of course, we are happy that the pictures are so popular.

The pictures are truly marvelous in bringing us near birds and other animals that few of us have a chance to see at all, let alone see so intimately. And the beauty of the land adds greatly to our pleasure and knowledge.

As to April 30th, all we can say is GET YOUR TICKETS AS SOON AS YOU CAN.
(Margaret Newman, P. O. Box 5032, Pawaa Station)

NOTES

DROP IN DUCK POPULATION. In the Honolulu Advertiser of January 12th, there is a report that the duck population has decreased throughout the Territory, according to Joseph S. Medeiros, wildlife conservation biologist. An inventory by air was taken over Oahu, Maui, Hawaii, and Molokai. The numbers for the last few years vary so greatly that it is puzzling to know the value of the count. In 1950, the count was 2,034; in 1951, 2,667; in 1952, 7,934, in 1953, 10,462. But the 1954 count was only 3,838, Maui having the greatest number 2,455.

"The pintail species is abundant, the shoveller, common, with the baldpates, scaup, and green-winged teal, played a lesser role."

Last year, the ducks were widely scattered, all hospitable localities made use of, but this year the ducks concentrated on a few areas. On Oahu, an old fish pond at Kuliouou, on the southern shore, has become a favorite spot, wild ducks being lured there by the presence of some pintail ducks placed there to recover from botulism.

AGE OF BIRDS. Has any of you wondered about the age of birds? A note in BIRD-BANDING (24:20, 1953) by C. L. Austin, reports that a common tern was found on Cape Cod, killed by an owl, "marked as an adult" on 26 July 1929", making it "at least 23 years old." (From IBIS, 95:712, 1953)

BULWER'S PETREL. Occasionally we are lucky enough to see a Bulwer's petrel. There is an account of it in the Atlantic area. "According to Bierman and Voous... (it) seems to be a resident in the eastern Atlantic Ocean between Cape Verde and the Canary Island...we were fortunate to observe this species in many other parts of the Atlantic Ocean...Sargasso Sea two days before entering the Caribbean...rather common off the northeast coast of Brazil...in addition one was seen about 350 miles southeast of St. Helena...On our return voyage...6 and 1 were respectively seen in the well-known wintering quarters southwest of West Africa.

"Our observations show that Bulweria winters numerous off the northeast coast of Brazil, while some individuals are found during our winter as far west as... about 450 miles northeast of Martinique, and as far south as 21° S., 9°30' W, i.e. in the South Atlantic about halfway between Africa and South America.

"Bulweria is generally a solitary and unsociable species, which rarely flies in small parties; only on 4 Jan. 1952 did we see a flock of 7. Unlike Jespersen... who saw this species around Madeira and the Canary Islands only at sunset or in twilight, we observed it--far from its breeding quarters--in bright sunshine at all hours of the day." ("On the pelagic distribution of some Procellariiformes in the Atlantic and Southern Oceans", by G. J. van Oordt and J. P. Kruij) IBIS, 95:620, 1953

BRAZILIAN CARDINALS. On January 12, while eating lunch in my car, near the Kahuku end of Kailua Beach Park, I counted 15 Brazilian cardinals in one flock, which crossed the road from the ironwood trees on the mauka side to the lawn on the makai side. After feeding for 15 or 20 minutes most of them were scared away by passing bathers.

Al Labrecque

Quite a few members of the Hawaiian Trail and Mountain Club attended the first AUDUBON SCREEN TOUR.

Al Labrecque

(It is pleasant news--that other clubs interested in the out-of-doors are enjoying these pictures. We hope they will continue their interest; we count on it. Editor)

FIELD TRIPS

February 14, 1954. Heavy clouds concealed the top of Tantalus, so Mr. McGuire suggested that we change our scheduled Tantalus trip to a walk at Koko Head. This proved a delightful trip, although not particularly good birding. A trail leads from the end of Portlock Road, winding down to the ocean, then back around the shoulder of the headland. Frigate birds, approximately 60 in number, soared effortlessly overhead. Two wandering tattlers, several brilliant Kentucky cardinals and half dozen gay Brazilian cardinals, with a scattering of white-eyes and rice birds, were also seen.

Whales disporting off shore roused much interest. It must have been a good day to see whales, as they were also reported by others as rollicking close off shore at Waianae, at about the same time we were watching these at Koko Head.

Part of the group went on to Kuapa pond after leaving Portlock Road. At the upper end of the pond we found a few sanderlings, plover and turnstones. The water was very low, with dead fish floating in large numbers. Possibly this was a contributing cause to the decided drop in numbers of birds from the Christmas count.

G. H.

February 28, 1954. Sunday morning, February 28, at a little past seven o'clock, in a torrential rain, Grace Gossard, Mace Norton, Joseph King, and Irma Botsford set out undaunted to visit the Waipahu Mud flats as had been scheduled. The party only got a little wetter trekking across the marsh to a vantage point on the banks of the pond and the rain slackened at times during the morning, or to put it another way, it didn't rain as hard sometimes as at other times.

The birding was good or average, but not phenomenal. There were scores of stilts, many flying in the peculiar fashion noted before with one leg drooping, and about 30 aukuu or night heron. In addition, there were tattlers, turnstoves, sanderlings and plovers, both black-bellied and golden. The beginning of the change from winter to breeding plumage was apparent in the golden plovers. There were not as many ducks as the party had hoped, but a sizable number of pintails and shovellers were observed.

Shortly before noon, another party of bedraggled bird watchers joined the original four who then started homeward in a roundabout way as usual. Time was taken to park near Wheeler Field with the hope that skylarks might be seen. The effort was well rewarded, for the skylarks were both seen and heard, one bird in particular giving a lovely solo as he wended his way heavenward. As it seems as though the birds might be nesting in the grass, it is hoped that permission may be granted for Audubon members to go inside the fence to observe.

The party then visited the pond back of Makalapa, approaching from two different sides. Again stilts, plover, tattlers, turnstoves, and sanderlings were observed, and in addition some eighty-nine ducks, pintails and shovellers, were checked. The next stop was made at the old Damon Pond, fallen into a sad state. Here a few coot and gallinules seemed to be the only bird life. A final stop was made at the Salt Lake, where with glasses, some ducks and heron were discernible.

Despite the rain, the bird walk was not only enjoyable, but also worthwhile from a birding viewpoint.

Irma Botsford

REVIEW

Mayr, E., Linsley, E. G. and Usinger, R. L. Methods and principles of systematic zoology. New York, 1953. (Reviewed in IBIS, 95:707, 1953, by D. W. S.) "Up till now many systematists have been self-taught...now there is no longer any excuse...Ornithologists interested in systematic work will find much of value in this book. Written by acknowledged authorities, one of whom is a leading ornithologist, and containing many examples drawn from birds, it will certainly be influential in shaping and guiding systematic opinion in the future."

APRIL FIELD TRIPS

April 11th, to Kealia Trail, in the Waianae. The approach is from the Moku-leia section. This is a new trail for our group. Mr. McGuire will lead. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 8:30 a.m.

April 25th, to Kaneohe Marine Air Station, to observe shore birds, which are now donning breeding plumage and will soon be leaving. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 7:00 a.m.

APRIL MEETING, on the 19th, at 7:30 p.m., in the Community Board Room of the N.W. C.A. Dr. Frank Richardson will lead the discussion on the chance migrants which come to Hawaii.

HAWAII AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS: President, Miss Grace Gossard; Vice Presidents, Mrs. Blanche A. Pedley, Miss Margaret Titcomb; Secretary, Miss Irma Botsford; Treasurer, Miss Margaret Newman.

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