

THE ELEPAIO

Journal of the
Hawaii Audubon Society



For the Better Protection
of Wildlife in Hawaii

Volume 14, Number 2

August, 1953

AFOOT AND AFIELD: The Akekeke or Ruddy Turnstone

By Helen Shiras Baldwin
(reprinted from the Hilo Tribune-Herald, October 9,
year?)

When sunrise begins to touch the sky with its first bright colors, little lumps on the lava of certain rocky beaches begin to stir as if at the command of some spell of enchantment. Through the dark hours these lumps appeared as stones of projections on the lava, brownish, grayish and black streaked with white lime deposit such as one often sees on rock close to the sea.

Now these little lumps begin to cluck softly to one another, "Ah-kay, ah-kay-kay, ah-kay-kay-kay", and transform as if by magic into plump short tailed little birds on nimble shrimp-pink feet.

Most books on bird lore state that the ruddy turnstone was so named because of his habit of turning over pebbles and other objects to eat the snails, worms or insects hiding under these. Still some people both in Hawaii and on the mainland where this bird is also a winter visitor, ~~vow~~ that the name was given because of the bird's ability to "turn into a stone" a slight provocation, so perfectly is it camouflaged.

But anyone who has heard the bird's clucking call notes will agree that the Hawaiian name "akekeke" duplicates this cry very well. Mr. George Munro in his "Birds of Hawaii" states that the name may be a variant of the Hawaiian word "ukeke" the name of an ancient stringed musical instrument. In this case the name may also refer to some of the other calls of this species, for the akekeke is more musical than most shore or sea birds, and, in summer, has some talent as a singer.

The flocks of akekeke do not stay by the seashore during the day, but, taking a drink of fresh or nearly fresh water and snatching a few unwary insects, soon fly off in crescent shaped flocks for the uplands where the birds feed on insects, especially grass armyworms and cutworms, and other small invertebrates in plowed fields, gardens, pasture lands and open waste lands.

A flock usually does not stay long in any one spot but flies on to other fields and then to others, returning at evening to its accustomed roosting rocks. Some flocks spend the night on bare lava in the uplands, but most prefer to sleep on the seashore near places where fresh water springs or streams run into the sea. A flock usually repeats its itinerary each day and often is found at the same upland field the same time each day, a trait hunters have long used to their advantage.

But the akekeke, like his cousin the plover or kolea, is a bird much too valu-

able to agriculture and much too slow in breeding large populations to be kept on the game bird list. Both the akekeke and the kolea are now protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Act and may not be shot lawfully any more.

A good game bird, that is, one which is suitable to extensive hunting over a period of many years, must be not only good eating and hard enough but not too hard to bag to be real sport to hunt; it also must be a species which will breed fast enough to make up the losses inflicted by hunting each year. Birds with large large broods of young, like pheasant and quail, or successive broods, like doves, make excellent game birds, especially as the breeding supply can be augmented by game-farmstock.

But the akekeke, like the kolea, cannot be reared in captivity, but flies each spring to Alaska, the Aleutians and other far northern regions to nest. A single clutch of four greenish eggs spotted with brown is laid in a shallow grass-lined nest on the ground.

If any of these eggs are destroyed or fail to hatch, or if any accident befalls the young, the annual increase in the akekeke species is decreased that much, for the arctic summer is much too short for second breeds. A fair proportion of breeding age adults, too, are lost through predators or storms or during the long flight back to Hawaii.

So every encouragement should be given to akekeke to increase and keep on with his good work of destroying our insect pests. The akekeke does not destroy fruits or vegetables or grain. He does eat sparingly of some weed seeds and wild berries, not all of which digest in the bird's body. He is credited, along with the kolea, of spreading the little wild white strawberry through the whole length of the Pacific coast from southern Alaska to Patagonia and to Hawaii, Tasmania and New Zealand. Because the fern spores cling to his feet and feathers, he is also credited with spreading the eagle brake, a fair sized fern, in the same regions.

Camera hunters will find the akekeke far more difficult game to "bag" than gun hunters did, for though the bird is not hard to approach, it is exceedingly difficult to maneuver into a position where a flock or even individual birds will show up against a background, unless in flight, when the akekeke makes a pretty pattern of chocolate black and white. The akekeke is still a turnstone and a picture of good live birds is likely to show only a field or rocks with lumps of dirt or stones.

ORNITHOLOGICAL NOTES, MIDWAY ISLANDS, 1940

By

Walter Donaghho

July 15, 1940: In the employ of the companies concerned with the construction of the proposed Naval Air Base, I arrived at Midway this morning on board the U.S.S. Sirius to begin a study of the rich ornithological life on the islands.

At first glance there was little evidence of the existence of the inhabitants of that great bird paradise. As the ship pulled up to the atoll, a few white terns were noted and sooty terns were flying about in small fishing parties. There was an occasional booby and frigate bird, and a few of the aristocratic gooney were floating on the surface of the water near the boat. Now and then, one would run along the surface, preliminary to the take-off. Young goonies were encountered as the launch passed through the channel in the reef and proceeded around the point of Sand Island to the dock. Several of them still had down about their necks, and looked like bird mimicry of Daniel Webster or Henry W. Longfellow. The breasts of the numerous sooty terns flying above us was tinted with delicate blue-green reflected from the lagoon, which caused one person to remark that they had blue breasts.

A station wagon was waiting at the Pan Air dock to speed us across the wide sand flat through the naupaka (Scaevola frutescens) covered dune to the camp behind. Several black-footed boobies were noted on the beaches. Many sooty terns were flying up from a large colony near the dunes in the direction of the Pan American hotel. We then drove down a sandy road winding through naupaka, under a cool grove of iron-woods, under which sat young albatrosses, past a vegetable garden, through more naupaka, and finally up to the grey buildings of the construction camp.

After being assigned to my quarters, and getting settled, I set out to get some first hand impressions of the bird city. My barracks was right in the midst of a large sooty tern colony, which extended far back toward the center of the island, and farther into the camp. But alas, this colony, and others were to suffer considerably as the Naval base grew.

I soon got acquainted with those two peculiar land birds from Laysan Island, the finch (Drepanidae) and the flightless rail, brought here by the Cable Station. The finch has done exceptionally well, being quite common, especially over on Eastern Island, while the rail is by no means rare. There was always a pair of rails about, wherever I chose to sit, out in the naupaka, and they always came up to give me a thorough scrutiny, looking me over carefully with their red eyes, approaching near me, but cautiously, ready to scatter at the slightest move on my part. Frequently they jumped up onto my leg and climbed up to my hip. They have a strong curiosity that exceeds by far that of the elepaio. Also noted were several of the true canaries, released from cages by the personnel of the Cable Station. Most of them had paled considerably, being nearly pure white.

July 26, 1940: Have now given the island a once over. Most of the sooty terns were on eggs that were just ready to hatch, or were mothering chicks from the "just out of the egg" stage to those about one fourth grown, with their secondary feathers developed. In one colony the chicks were half grown or over.

Wedge-tailed shearwaters were, for the most part, on eggs; many still mating and digging their burrows, no chicks seen.

The Bosun bird was nursing chicks of all stages; some also on eggs about ready to hatch. I couldn't find any relatively fresh eggs.

The Laysan albatross still came in, in small numbers, to feed their almost grown young, though more of the young were deserted, left either to learn to fly, or die. No black-footed albatross were seen in adult stage; a few young remained on the beaches.

The Hawaiian tern had not started nesting, at least I did not find any occupied nests. The white tern's nesting was in all stages, from the egg to the flying young.

I found the rails with chicks, and discovered a nest of freshly laid eggs today. A finch's nest with four eggs nearly ready to hatch was also found, and I saw fledglings pursuing their mothers through the brush.

July 27, 1940: Noted several plover and turnstones on the sand flats at the east end of the island today, presumably first arrivals from Alaska.

August 6, 1940: Noted a Bonin petrel over near the PAA office, on the ground near a hole. Investigation of the hole produced nothing, however.

August 10, 1940: Noted sooty tern fledglings trying to fly, and saw one actually leave the ground. This is the first seen by me in the air this year.

Just about all the adult Laysan albatross have left; a scanty number of young birds remain. The black-footed species has gone completely.

August 16, 1940: An unusual number of Bonin petrel flew all over the island this evening. Few landed, however. They chased each other about in the air, emitting their peculiar squeals and kitten-like growls.

Many immature sooty terns were flying about in the colonies about the barracks of the construction camp.

Very few Laysan albatross remain, only ten or so around the camp.

The soot tern colony at the South point of the island has chicks, the largest of which are only one-quarter grown.

August 18, 1940: Bonin petrel were exceedingly thick in the evening sky; they literally filled the sky, thousands, and thousands of birds. It made an impressive sight which will be hard to forget. At night, their white bodies, reflected in the light of the bright lamps, fairly covered the lighted area above with white dots, as thick as stars on a clear, dark evening. Their weird squeals and growls made a constant din, suggestive of wind roaring through pines.

August 24, 1940: Paid a visit to Eastern Island to make a general survey of bird life there. That island is truly a bird paradise, having more species nesting there and birds in greater numbers than on Sand Island. The noddy tern was common, their nests just under the edges of the naupaka clumps inland of the beach, along the south side of the island. Scared up from their nests, they revealed the eggs they had left. Large meadows were crossed in the interior of the island, on which I noted several blue-faced boobies, some of which with nearly grown chicks. Two or three brown boobies were noted here, as well as two immature (flying) greybacked terns amidst a colony of sooties. I heard the cries of a mother grey-back amid the din of the sooty-backed cousins.

Frigate birds, immature and adult, were perched on the naupaka, in the company of red-footed boobies. Now and then a wedge-tailed shearwater was seen either under or in the air; once a Christmas shearwater flew overhead.

(To be continued)

HUI MANU

Belatedly, we report the meeting on May 14th of the Hui Manu, to which our president and one other were invited. It was a most interesting meeting, held at the beautiful home of Mr. and Mrs. Reginald H. Carter. The high point of the meeting was the report of Mr. Carter on his work of talking to schools about birds, mostly the introduced birds. To make his talks more vivid, he takes with him colored enlargements of pictures of the birds. The audience was glad to see them too. Mr. Carter responds to all calls, and, as evidenced by many letters received from children, they respond with interest to this generous service. It is a most laudable work, for here starts interest in birds, in nature, in conservation rather than destruction. The record of last year rose to 17,000 children who had purchased a Hui Manu button, signifying adherence to the aim of Mr. Carter's talk to take pleasure in birds, refrain from hurting them.

A series of reports of what birds seen where was given from the floor by various members. (It would be a pleasure to record any observations in this sheet if they are sent in.) Reports included: three owls seen frequently on Tantalus, three in Kalihi; cardinals plentiful in Nuuanu; meadowlarks less plentiful on Kauai; a heron was constantly seen at Waiahole but has now disappeared; the mocking bird is less often seen, but is reported to be fairly numerous in Diamond Head Crater; Kamehameha School grounds is still a location they favor.

The president, Mrs. Alfred L. Castle, read Pricilla Harpham's article on the shama thrush, from the Elepaio, and discussion followed. One additional fact was offered: this thrush was introduced by Mrs. Dora Isenberg, of Kauai, and did not make its presence known for ten years after introduction.

Mr. Castle was able to report that he had been successful in calling attention of members of the Legislature to the bill allowing importation of birds to be resumed. The bill was signed by the Governor on this very day. As formerly, the Board of Agriculture and Forestry passes on the suggestions for importation.

On view, was an attractive bird cage, or house, with cleverly invented and easily cleanable shelf for bird food. Mr. J. Howard Ellis has taken on the hobby of making these, and must be a busy man!

REVIEW

"Birds Which May be Seen On Oahu", is a set of five mimeographed pages by Edwin H. Bryan, Jr. It is a most handy set of descriptions of 29 birds, the few native birds and the several introduced land birds, and the shore birds also.

THE LEAST TERN PAYS A VISIT

An exciting event in local ornithology was the discovery of a Least Tern (*Sterna albifrons* subsp.) during the Society's field trip on May 24th. The bird was studied closely for at least thirty minutes in excellent light by seven persons, several of whom were well acquainted with this species on the Mainland. There are apparently no previous records of published observations of Least Terns in the Hawaiian Islands.

The bird was first seen about noon, resting on the sand at the edge of the large pond on Kaneohe Marine Corps Air Station, and subsequently allowed to approach to within 35 feet. It was also observed on the wing as it flew out over the pond on several occasions, each time returning to rest again on the same stretch of sand. The following characteristics and field marks were noted; typical tern proportions and flight; deeply forked tail; triangular white forehead patch bordered by a black line on the side of the head; pale gray mantle and white underparts and tail. The bill was bright yellow with a black tip, and was proportionately long and slender. The feet and legs were orange-shaded yellow.

On at least two occasions, the bird came to rest among some ruddy turnstones, affording a good size comparison. With its longer tail, the tern appeared to be about the same length as the turnstones, although its body was noticeably smaller. Its legs were very noticeably short, and in height the turnstones stood well above the tern.

As a species, the Least Tern is found on the coasts of all the continents, including Japan, Australia and California, and on certain of the large rivers. There are many subspecies, but of course the subspecific identification of this particular individual could not be determined by sight. Because of the prevailing easterly trade winds, it is suggested that this bird may have come from the Pacific Coast of California or Mexico.

Bob Pyle

A CALL TO OUR READERS

The monthly meetings of the Society have covered five native birds still to be seen on Oahu. Now, attention is to be turned to some of the introduced birds. The

Kentucky cardinal is to start the list. May we hear from our readers? How do you rate this red bird? What kind of an actor is he in your experience? What kind of an immigrant? Please let us hear from you. (Box 5032, Pawa Station, Honolulu, 14, T. H.)

Editor

BIRD PROTECTION BILL, passed by the 1953 Legislature

Act 78, S. L. 1953. An Act Providing for the Protection and Conservation of Wild Birds, amending sections 1158 to 1161, inclusive, and repeating sections 1154, 1155, 1156, 1162, 1163, 1164 and 1165 of the Revised Laws of Hawaii 1945.

Section 1. Sections 1158, 1159, 1160 and 1161 of the Revised Laws of Hawaii 1945, are hereby amended to read as follows:

"Sec. 1158. Wild birds defined. For the purposes of this chapter, the term 'wild birds' shall mean all birds, other than game birds as defined in Section 1152, living in a wild and undomesticated state, and the young and the eggs of such birds. From time to time the Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry shall publish in a newspaper of general circulation a list of all introduced birds which have become wild birds.

"Sec. 1159. Permits to take wild birds. The Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry shall have power to make and amend with the approval of the Governor, rules and regulations:

(a) Authorizing the taking and collecting of wild birds for scientific purposes or for the purpose of distributing wild birds to different localities in the Territory;

(b) Authorizing the keeping of wild birds in captivity for the protection, treatment for injury or disease, and such other similar purposes as are consistent with the preservation, protection and conservation of wild birds; and

(c) Authorizing the taking and destruction of such wild birds as the Board may have found after investigation to be destructive to crops or otherwise harmful to agriculture, provided that such authority shall be limited to such places and such times as may be necessary for the protection of a particular crop. Such rules and regulations shall require the person or persons seeking such authority to apply for and obtain a written permit from the Board. Such permits may prescribe such terms and conditions as the Board may deem necessary to prevent abuse of the authority granted thereby, and may be cancelled by the Board, after notice and bearing, for the violation of any such term or condition.

"Sec. 1160. Penalty. It shall be unlawful for any person, other than a person holding a permit issued under the provisions of Section 1159, to take, catch, injure, kill or destroy, or attempt to take, catch, injure, kill or destroy, or keep or have possession of any wild bird, dead or alive, or to damage or destroy a nest of any wild bird. Any person violating the provisions of this section shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and, upon conviction thereof, shall be punished by a fine of not less than twenty-five dollars (\$25.00) nor more than two hundred dollars (\$200.00), or by imprisonment of not more than ninety days, or both fine and imprisonment.

"Sec. 1161. Keeping of birds in captivity; penalty. It shall be unlawful for any person to keep in captivity any bird which is of any species of wild bird unless such bird was lawfully imported into the Territory or was bred in captivity from birds lawfully imported. Any person violating the provisions of this section shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction thereof, shall be punished by a fine of not less than twenty-five dollars (\$25.00) nor more than two hundred dollars (\$200.00), or by imprisonment of not more than thirty days, or by both fine and imprisonment."

Section 2. Sections 1154, 1155, 1156, 1162, 1163, 1164, and 1165 of the Revised Laws of Hawaii 1945 are hereby repealed.

Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 1953.

Approved this 14th day of May, A. D., 1953

Governor of the Territory of Hawaii

NENE AND THE MARINES

Isolation is a difficult state to acquire for our precious nene (Hawaiian goose) here in Hawaii. In June there was a Marine training encampment close to the area of Pohakuloa, where the nene are spaciouly caged.

However, according to a report in the Honolulu Star-Bulletin (June 26th), kindly sent in by Helen L. Chambers, of the Star-Bulletin staff, the nene were in luck. J. R. Woodworth, "Big Island wildlife biologist, credited avoidance of more than slight disturbance to the understanding and cooperation of Lt. Col. Melvin D. Henderson, commanding officer of the Marines training there." Col. Henderson had been wildlife conservation officer for Camp Pendleton, California, and through his good management, some experimental grass and shrub plantings were avoided as practice fields, no illegal hunting occurred, and the nene, at first frightened "when planes buzzed Pohakuloa Camp at the start of operations," were quieted when, "upon request pilots stayed away from the immediate area."

FIELD TRIP TO ULUPAU HEAD

On June 14th there was another visit to Ulupau Head. Most of the faithful came along on this always popular trip, and some guests were included, most of them with cameras for shooting the brave boobies that hold their place doggedly no matter how close humans get to their rough twig nests and them. Many nests held both blue-billed adult bird and black-billed, fluffy young birds. A couple of weeks ago, a few club members made a special trip to the spot and saw eggs on the nests.

Estimates differed from 300 to 500 for the number of boobies in the hollow and its slopes. As usual there was a few frigate birds high overhead and a few sooty terns flying close over the water. As usual those with glasses could see the myriads of birds on the two blocks of land a couple of miles off the Head-Moku Manu (bird islands). Those without glasses could see the moving specks in the air and on the rocks.

As we came away, a V-shaped flight of pin-tail ducks, high in the air, made its way southward.

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POPOIA AT DUSK

On Saturday afternoon, July 11th, several members and some of their friends met on the beach at Kailua, ready to board Mr. de Mello's launch and go the short distance across the water to the low island of Popoia, a few stones' throw off shore to see the shearwaters. At the minute beach where we landed, there were a tent and some campers settled, having a merry time. As to the birds and the campers, we felt happy to notice that the campers seemed interested in the shellfish! But are the birds on Popoia as numerous as they used to be? It did not seem so, to this infrequent visitor.

After some time spent in exploring the hollows in the coral foundation of the island we felt rewarded for coming. We must have spied somewhere between thirty and fifty birds down in their half-hidden nests, most of them probably sitting on eggs. Some were. Of that we were positive. One careless matron assumed the egg-warming posture, but the egg was almost entirely out from under her feathers. A few nests held eggs, but no birds. Deserted? Or only briefly away?

As dusk settled, a few birds came back to the island, swooping swiftly round and about us and across the small land and the sea. Some of us feared that the presence of fifteen people, to say nothing of the gay campers, might make the birds fearful of getting into their nests, or making themselves at home in any way. But that did not seem to be so, for some of them landed very near and squatted down in cool and silent detachment, as our flash-lights showed.

Greater dark brought more birds, but how many came no one tried to guess. Our attention was now on listening for their sounds. Either the time of their living cycle was not right for making themselves markedly audible, or there were not as many birds as on a previous visit. There was not as much noise. But they did give their characteristic moan, which the observant Hawaiians used as their name for the shearwater: uwau. They made other sounds, too, beyond me to describe at this distance.

The learned members of the club, Grenville, Blanche, Bob Pyle, and others, drew some of the rest of us to the hole they were surrounding. Sure enough, they had a rarity, a Bulwer's petrel. The banding apparatus on hand did not seem to fit this bird, alas. But we were well satisfied to see it, intimately near. In fact it was held for several minutes by Bob Pyle and we could observe its black body and black feet. Then it was carefully stowed away in its coral hole of a nest. The clucking sound it made was what betrayed it to Blanche Pedley. We were glad to note that the same sound came from a few other spots in the area. That petrel was not alone.

Not long after the inkiness of night came, we "launched" back to shore--a good day recorded.

MEMBERS who had hoped to meet Mr. Keisuke Kobayashi, whose interesting articles have appeared in the ELEPAIO, will be disappointed to learn that he passed through Honolulu on his way back to Japan on July 8th, but was unable to remain except for a short time between planes. Those of us who were able to meet the plane had the pleasure of hearing a little about his birding experiences in Europe, and something about the birds of Japan, as well as receiving first hand information about our old friend, Chester Fennell. We look forward to Mr. Kobayashi's promised return, for a longer stay with us.

JULY FIELD TRIP

On July 12th, 18 members and friends gathered at the Library of Hawaii at 8:30

for the scheduled trip to Waiawa, under Mr. McGuire's leadership. A long ride through dusty pineapple fields led us to the beginning of the trail, which, being a ditch trail, is broad and well kept. After a few minutes walk, the beauty of the wide Waiawa Valley was spread before us. The trail led up the valley, the banks beside the ditch covered with delicate maidenhair fern, and studded with gay impati-
ence blossoms. Mountain apple, banana, kukui, koa, interspersed with giant ape were noted along the way. The air was fragrant with yellow ginger. At the end of the trail, most of the party descended to go through the water tunnel, about 2000 feet in length. Shoeless, they made their way through and out to join the others who had prosocially, but comfortably, retraced their steps.

Birding was only fair, although liothrix and white-eye were heard all along the way, and apapane were seen close to the top, but all were entranced by the fairy-land beauty of the trail, and felt we owed a rather special vote of thanks to Mr. McGuire for leading us into such a delightful spot.

Three of us made the trip again the following Sunday, starting early. Mountain apples were ripening fast, and the trees were full of white-eyes and liothrix feeding upon the juicy fruit. Here is our count for the morning - far from complete. No effort was made to count white-eyes and rice birds, and the liothrix count does not approximate the actual numbers present.

Bush warbler	3	Liothrix	49	Elepaio	6
Kentucky cardinal	6	Linnet	1		

AUGUST FIELD TRIPS

August 9th. To Manoa Cliffs trail. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 8:30 a.m. Perhaps a second trip under Mr. McGuire's leadership will help us to remember the plants and trees on this interesting trail.

August 23. To Pa Lehua. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 7:00 a.m. This is one of our favorite trails--good birding, and fine vistas.

AUGUST MEETING

August 17th., at 7:30 p.m. Meet at the home of Ruth Rockafellow, 2232B Kalia Road. The Brazilian cardinal will be studied under the leadership of Grace Gossard.

HAWAII AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS: President, Miss Grenville Hatch; Vice-Presidents, Mr. Mace Norton, Miss Margaret Titcomb; Secretary, Mrs. Ruth R. Rockafellow; Treasurer, Mrs. Blanche A. Pedley.

EDITOR, THE ELEPAIO: Miss Margaret Titcomb.

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