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ORNITHOLOGICAL NOTES, MIDWAY ISLANDS, 1940

By
Walter Donaghho
(continued)

November 8: Noted a pair of Laysan albatrosses doing a little dancing. From what I saw, their motions were much slower than those of their black cousins. The dance seemed to be a series of follow-the-leader motions, one bird took the lead, the other repeated. The motions of the white birds were stiff in comparison to those of the black goonies.

Several shearwaters came in to feed their young, which were nearly full fledged. However, the fact that I have heard no moanings in the past two weeks leads me to believe that it is probable that the males have departed, and only a few females come in to feed the young, which are quite fat.

November 9: Went around the island to see how large the black-footed albatross colonies were getting.

The albatrosses have settled in fair numbers on the cleared spaces inland and the open spaces of the upland. The flat just west of the high area was covered with an immense colony that stretched in an unbroken line to the north and south—thousands of goonies. In the colony near South Point the sand was black with goonies, all honking, snorting, and wheezing, which combined to make a continual din. There was much activity: fighting, squabbling with each other over territory, dancing; females wandering nonchalantly through the colony were suddenly mowed down and trampled by from two to nine males, all trying to "board" her at once. It was an amazing sight, one of the red letter days for me, among many others on Midway. A great colony had formed also on the flat around the garbage pit and there was an adjacent one to the north, both thrilling to see.

I noted a pair of Laysan albatross undergoing sexual intercourse. They have not formed any colonies yet, except around the hotel, where there are large numbers. In high contrast to the boisterous and loud honks of the black species, the white goonies sounded like a lot of birds with colds and hoarse throats. They frequently emitted a whistled whinny, which penetrated the air like a lot of extremely high, shrill steam whistles.

November 13: Today was a miserable, rainy day that drove in Laysan albatross in great numbers. All through the day, the sky was filled with returning birds. Mr. Harvey Johnson reported having seen around 30 eggs of black-footed albatross on Eastern Island. The bosun birds are gradually leaving.

November 14: Went over to the west flat and noted several black-footed albatross sitting on their eggs. Two or three were in the process of laying. They were standing in their nest, forcing the egg down the vagina. Now and then they sat down for a rest, but soon stood up to continue the laying. The male was seated right by his mate usually, and when the egg was laid took over the duties of warming it, promptly or deliberately.

The Laysan albatross were already building nests, and a good deal of their behavior evidently had sexual meaning. I watched them dance many times, the movements much more rapid than what I saw on November 9th, and stiff and awkward compared to the graceful, easy flowing movements of the black gooney in its dance. In fact the white gooney's stiff bowing and other movements were comical to watch. One especially amusing motion was a sort of "cakewalk", in which the birds goose-stepped, and pranced, bowing and nodding their heads at each step, danced around in a circle, each bird going in the opposite direction from the other.

The whole dance was accompanied by whistled whinnies; when bowing they clattered bills each against the other's. As the birds pointed their bills toward the sky, they emitted a nasal moan resembling the bawl of a calf. Very remarkable was the skill in which they clattered their bills. Standing erect, they pointed the bill to the sky, then, lowering it, immediately began to clatter it with the most astonishing rapidity, as a South American dancer would clatter her castanets. But no dancer ever rattled her castanets with the rapidity of the gooney's bill-clattering.

I believe the terns have gone completely, except for a handful of young, most of which will go, or have gone. In the empty site of the North Point colony, I saw one adult tern in the air today, but no others were seen or heard. No more than six immature terns were seen, and they were so weak that they fairly flopped along.

November 17th: Noted the first egg of the Laysan albatross today. Hunted most of the island for them, but failed to find any others.

I was down at the PAA radio-beam towers at South Point at 5 o' clock this evening when the Bonin petrels began streaming in over the dunes by the thousands. Flowing over the line of dunes like water bursting from a broken dam, they flooded the island, filling the air with their numbers.

November 19: A Greater Noddy was reported sitting on an egg over on Eastern Island. Quite surprising, considering that these birds have already finished raising one brood. Of late, the young terns on Sand Island are all immature birds that are flying. Also, two Laysan albatross were seen on eggs.

November 22: Many white goonies are appearing now. Laysan goonies still streaming in. Much scrambling among the males for females, anywhere from two to ten all trying to get on top of a trampled female at once. Others have stopped fighting and are choosing nest sites, still others are building nests. The method used to hollow out a nest in the sand is very amusing. Standing over the proposed nest, they squat--after first pushing out sand with their feet--and, using the tail end of their bodies, begin squirming and wiggling it back and forth and around in circles, making a bowl-shaped hollow.

White terns are getting scarce. Only one or two still linger in the iron-woods in the Contractor's garden; formerly there were quite a few.

The black-footed albatross have just about all arrived, and are now incubating, though there is still a little fighting over mates.

November 26: Paid a visit to Eastern Island today, and found both the albatrosses in much greater numbers. The black-footed species were nesting all along the beaches, just above the high water mark. Large colonies were located at the West Point, and up the northern side, near the eastern end of the island. Here, the nests were scarcely a yard apart, barely out of reach of each other's bills. From a few yards distance, the beach looked black with them.

Though a few Laysan albatross were nesting on the shore, the bulk of them nested inland in the large interior meadows. Here, the colonies were immense.

I followed a trail leading through the Scaevola, and, entering the meadow, was greeted by a breath-taking sight. Vast open spaces stretching away before me were literally covered with goonies. Thousands upon thousands of them made the meadows white; the air was filled with their whistles and cries. I was awestruck at the wonderful, almost unbelievable sight before me. Never have I been more thrilled. I walked as in a daze into the gooney colony. However, it was very disconcerting to realize how short-lived this gooney city was to be. It was doomed by the development of this island as a landing field. This sight will be lost to future ornithologists.

A few frigate birds are still on the island, and several red-footed and brown boobies. Young wedge-tailed shearwaters were resting on the meadows, and several dead ones were noted on the beaches. Many immature noddy terns were resting on the Scaevola clumps along the south beach, and several adults were noted on eggs.

A wild duck was seen to fly over the water and land on the island. I scared it up later, and recognized the green head of a male mallard. A white ring encircled the neck.

A shorebird list was taken, the route being from halfway along the south beach, to and rounding the South and East Points. Results: turnstone, 45; golden plover, 17; wandering tattler, 11; curlew, 9; sanderling, 4; and pectoral sandpiper, 2.

November 28: Took a list of shorebirds along a route from the Cable Station to the garbage pit, via East Point. Results: turnstone, 103; golden plover, 78; bristle-thighed curlew, 18; pectoral sandpiper, 12; wandering tattler, 2; and black-bellied plover, 1.

Today I was shown an albatross which I believe to be the short-tailed albatross. It was on the sand flats south of the Marine camp, among the black-footed and Laysan species, and was slightly larger than the two. It has a larger bill of a pink, fleshy color, with a black band around the base. The plumage was apparently in a stage of change from the chocolate, immature plumage to the white adult, and the bird was splotted with black, brown, grey, greyish, and white. This was the second record of this species on Midway, as Mr. F. C. Hadden, in 1938, recorded an albatross in similar plumage, indeed, almost identical to the one seen today. The bird died, however. It seems safe to assume the identity of the bird, as there are only three species of albatross in these northern waters.

December 15: Saw two gulls flying along the north beach near the pier today which I believe were glaucous winged gulls. One of them, a young bird, seemed to fit the plumage description of the glaucous young.

December 28th: Noted two white-tailed tropic birds today flying over the island near the Cable Station. One was flying close over the steel boom of a crane, and tried twice to land on it. I have been informed by the Cable Station men that these birds occasionally nest here, but I will have to find that out for certain. A few Laysan albatross are building nests and preparing to lay, but the majority are sitting.

January 5: Went to Eastern Island this afternoon to note the condition of the island after the Contractors started to work there. Large areas have been cleared for runways, which extended clear across the island in both directions. There were three strips of cleared areas and these ran right through the Laysan albatross colonies. Dead bodies of albatrosses, crushed by "cats" while trying to defend their nests, lay about. Everywhere there was evidence of slaughter. I noticed that the remaining gooneys, which were grouped alongside the runways, were much more wary, taking great pains to get out of my way.

The black-footed gooney colonies were untouched, though the brush, in some cases, was piled right up next to them.

I am afraid that I have been the last ornithologist to see the wonderful paradise that this island was. I have gazed upon an ornithological wonder that has ceased to exist. It is also unfortunate to realize that the days of the gooney itself are numbered. To make way for the needs of civilization, the albatross will have to forfeit a stronghold that they have used and cherished for years.

(to be continued)

FIELD NOTES, OAHU

An unscheduled bird observing tour of the island took place on Sunday, September 6th, six members present.

The first stop was at a corner of Pearl Harbor, near Aiea, where 12 turnstone, 7 plover, 5 auku'u and 4 stilt came into view. Mace's telescope-on-a-tripod was a wonderful help all day long. The characteristics of motion, the red color of the eye of the auku'u, the exact stage of plumage of the plovers, etc. were all clear to the eyes, through the scope.

At the Waipahu end of West Loch, Pearl Harbor, we waded through the mud, bending down the weeds before each step, grateful for occasional boards to step on. But the birds were worth the muddy foot-treatment. All water within view was searched for birds, but our count was confined to the Waipahu end of the loch, the rest being too far away for accuracy: 19 coot, 6 pintail ducks, many black-bellied plover, and 133⁺ golden plover, at least 50 turnstone, and 91 stilt. The black-bellied plover were a new sight to some of us and merited long observation and discussion. We marvelled at its name, for the "black belly" was white, as far as we could determine. Joseph King suggested that the black belly is there in spring and summer, that is, nesting time. Other characters were: a slightly larger size than the golden plover, a very dark beak, heavier and shorter than in the golden plover, with a down curve at the tip; back black and white, mottled, in three or four broad, vague streaks, tail feathers lighter, one very dark spot underneath the wing. We are not certain about the identity of this bird, but until we know for sure we are calling it the black-bellied plover.

Going on to Kahuku, we had considerable difficulty in finding a road that goes to the shore, without requiring a leap over the fence. The ancient (two years ago) glories of Kahuku Pond, with numberless migratory and Hawaiian shore birds, were in the minds of those of us who had known it. Sadly, we viewed the dry area, completely birdless. Over the shore dune, along the beach itself, two stilt sandpipers, 2 wandering tattlers, 3 plover and 1 sanderling were observed, far away from the few pole fishermen enjoying the area. The blessed sea's immunity and freedom gave comfort to our thoughts.

At a quiet corner of Kahana Bay, in the siesta-afternoon time, we found one

auku'u, resting on a branch of milo on the little peninsula across the water from us; 3 gallinule dawdled at the grassy edge of the water, appearing, disappearing. But Mace's scope was there to catch them when they were out of the grasses for a moment.

The last stop made a sad ending for the day. At Kaelepulu Pond, which for time immemorial has stretched its shallow waters out over a hundred acres or so of the land back of the southern Kailua shore area, and has been the refuge of numberless waterfowl, we found a dam had been put in to keep the sea-water out, a few dead fish evidence of its stagnancy. And the pond was dry, except far off inland, where a streak of water remained. Here some 20 \pm plover, 75 \pm gallinule and 1 stilt were seen to be moving along the narrow water.

"The only place left where the stilt can mate and nest!" said one of us.

"Can we do anything to save part of the pond and all of the birds?" we asked ourselves. The topic was tossed back and forth on the homeward way. We were a heavy-hearted lot, but determined to speak for the birds with all our powers.

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FIELD NOTES, OAHU, Moku Manu

On September 13th, two members of the Society had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to visit Moku Manu, the Forbidden Island. Moku Manu means Bird Island in Hawaiian, and there could hardly be a more appropriate name for this pair of volcanic blocks lying about 3500 feet off the tip of Kaneohe Peninsula, windward Oahu. From January to July, large areas on the islets are almost literally covered with the eggs and nests of tens of thousands of oceanic birds, mainly boobies, terns, shearwaters, and frigate birds. In any month, large numbers of these birds are on, around and hovering over the islands like a cloud of lazy insects. From Kaneohe Peninsula, looking across at this avian hive, a real bird-watcher will invariably mutter to himself, "Some day I'm going to go there."

But desire and attainment are separated by considerably more than the 3500 feet of ocean. The Territorial Board of Agriculture and Forestry has prudently established Moku Manu as a bird sanctuary. Permission to set foot on the islands is granted very seldom, and then only for ventures that will add significantly to our knowledge of the bird colonies. Nature has also contributed her bit to the islands' isolation, for they are ringed with terraces of jagged rock or the cliffs rise vertically out of the ocean. Even jumping ashore from a wooden boat is possible only on certain days, under the most ideal conditions of wind and waves.

So the invitation to make a try for Moku Manu, conveyed in a post-midnight phone call, was accepted without hesitation, even though it meant arising three hours later from a night's "sleep" that had not yet begun.

Departing from Kailua Beach in a small fishing craft, skippered by Solo Mahoe, we skirted Kaneohe Peninsula and in slightly under an hour were anchored some yards away from the Forbidden Island. The Island towered vertically well over 100 feet above us and flocks of birds, aroused by Solo's whistles, came to investigate us: frigate birds drifting slowly out from the heights and common noddies springing from the rocks nearer the water.

At the base of the cliffs is a level "beach" or shelf of solid rock standing a yard or two above the water. Even on this almost ideally calm day, the surging ocean

beat powerfully on the edge of the rocks, alternately inundating and exposing for several feet the particular ledge where we were to land. The prospects of a successful landing on this unyielding rock wall seemed dim indeed, but Solo Mahoe is a boatman of incomparable skill. With some neat maneuvering in a small rowboat, towed out there for this purpose, and involving a rope link with an assistant on the larger boat and with some split second timing, we were all able to scramble ashore in our turn.

Thus at 9:45 a.m. Grenville Hatch and Bob Pyle were standing on Moku Manu, ready to begin a 5½ hour exploring trip. Following Solo along the flat rock terrace, we crunched small snails with every step, and skirted tiny tide pools containing brightly patterned finger-length fish. Motioning us to stay back, Solo crept up on a larger pool connected with the ocean, flung his weighted circular net expertly, and then dove in. A few moments later he climbed out with a netful of fish: ahulehule, manini, and mullet. We continued on across rock and occasional small sandy beaches which were separated from the ocean by the rocky terrace. At the foot of the cliffs we found dead remains of golden plovers, not too old, and many stray feathers and bones.

Finally we reached an old sign whose badly faded message read, "KAPU - LANDING FORBIDDEN". At this point we turned abruptly from the sea and clambored up a steep incline of rocks and packed sand. During this ascent, Red-Footed Booby birds and Common Noddies were flying about us continually, joined by an occasional Brown Booby neatly patterned in dark brown and white.

On top we found that only Red-Footed Boobies were still engaged in nesting activities. An estimated fifty active nests each contained one young bird, ranging from downy chicks of about six weeks to fully feathered juvenals almost ready to fly. There was at least one adult brooding an egg and another which refused to leave a very fresh nest and which we suspected was brooding. The former bird wore a federal bird band, and our clumsy efforts to capture it and read the number were successful only because of the parent's powerful urge to protect its egg. When released, the bird departed vociferously, but within half an hour was back again and settled comfortably on the egg.

There were uncountable cavities of various depths used within recent months as nests, apparently by shearwaters. One adult shearwater, probably wedge-tailed, was seen to leave a cavity. Later on, one fairly large downy chick, a fluffy bundle of mouse gray, was taken from another burrow and photographed.

Frigate-birds were the most abundant species by far. When settled in loose flocks on the steeper, vegetated slopes, these looked for all the world like big vultures resting comfortably after a big meal. They would allow us to approach in clear view to thirty or forty feet before taking flight. But it was also possible to quietly approach the top of a steep cliff and, looking over the edge, to stare into the eye of a Frigate-bird hardly ten feet away. At least 500 of these birds were estimated to be on and about the island, with males, females and juvenals in about equal proportions. The reddish gular patch showed narrowly on the throats of most males, and one male bird was noted with his gular sac partially inflated.

A sharp repeated call emanating from what was said to be an old heiau or temple was finally traced to a Sooty Tern with a badly crippled left wing—possibly a juvenile bird. At frequent intervals an adult bird appeared overhead, calling to the grounded bird and scolding us when we were nearby. Its screams were answered by the

crippled bird on the ground, and on one occasion the adult was seen to alight beside the cripple. Could this be the parent bird and was it still feeding the cripple? There were certainly no fish to be caught on the top of this desert-like island. The nesting season for Sooty Terns had long since concluded, and the others of this species had departed except for a flock of perhaps a dozen that appeared briefly over the smaller islet in the afternoon.

During our stay from 9:45 a.m. to 3:45 p.m., there were estimated to be about 35 adult Red-footed Boobies and 20 flying juvenals; about a dozen adult Brown Boobies and half a dozen flying juvenals; 300 Common Noddies roughly estimated; and, on the island top, three to eight Ruddy Turnstones. On the rocky terrace below, we saw one or two tattlers and two or three golden plovers. Hawaiian Noddies were observed about the caves and rocks near the water.

We saw no vertebrates other than birds, but Grenville did discover the dried skin and bones of a small rat with a long and hairless tail. Richardson and Fisher found no rodents at all on Moku Manu in 1947 and 1948, and the presence of this carcass invites speculation. Was it carried over by a pueo (owl) or some other bird? Did it arrive as a stowaway on a fishing boat? Are there rodents now established here?

It required several hours of exploring before the novelty and thrill of being on these particular fifteen acres began to subside. A pint of water, a cheese sandwich and an orange, all divided between us, had been our only sustenance and with the sun glaring down on us relentlessly all day, new importance became attached to such items as cold liquid refreshment, a steak dinner, and most of all a bit of shade. We picked our way back down the slope to the terrace and the welcome shade of an overhanging rock. Solo again supervised our transfer from island to boat with such supreme skill and confidence that this normally very difficult and potentially calamitous operation seemed no more dangerous than stepping from an automobile.

Thus we promoted an unforgettable trip to the Forbidden Island, at the insignificant cost of a few scratches, a temporarily empty stomach, a bit of fresh bird lime, and at least one thoroughly sunburned face. This inveterate bird-watcher will always be deeply grateful to certain other H.A.S. members whose commitments elsewhere made it possible for him to replace them on this trip.

FIELD NOTES:

On September 27th, at the upper end of the Pearl Harbor Loch at Waipahu, six birds were observed which Mace Norton and myself are satisfied were lesser yellow legs. We had them under observation for the better part of an hour, through Mace's twenty power scope. The color of the legs was clearly visible, and the shaded coloration of the breast, running into whitish below, with the white rump showing in flight. There were approximately fifty plover, more black-bellied than golden, about the same number of pintails. The count of stilt was amazing - 340 in one flock. On the same day, at Moanalua garden, we found 17 coot, and one lone gallinule was in sight.

Grenville Hatch

DAWN AND DUSK COUNT

The next dawn and dusk count will be held on November 22nd. Anyone wishing to participate is asked to note the exact time the first call and the first song of each.

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species, and the time of the last call and last song of each. We shall be up early for our field trip - perhaps we can do the dawn count easily. It would be particularly glad to have reports from beach and mountain areas. Telephone your results to Grenville Hatch, 94862, in the evening, or send a written report as soon as possible to the post box.

A BELATED FIELD NOTE FROM KAILUA

Yesterday (December 2, 1952) I watched a family of Hawaiian ducks for about a half hour...on the bank of the slough they were taking the morning sun. The juvenals, as I judged them to be by somewhat smaller size and less marked coloring, were napping and stretching. The drake dozed and stretched till contented, then stood up and displayed the beauty of his tail feathers. He stretched them upright, just as a peacock does. The feathers seemed straight, displayed in a complete half circle, with some spaces between feathers.

NOTE

A reprint from the Emu has been received from Keisuke Kobayashi on the Eastern Little Tern and the common or Nordmann's tern in Japan. Mr. Kobayashi gives the account of the migration of these terns, the breeding, and the plumage.

His observations were made at Osaka Bay at Honshu, Japan at 1950 to 1952.

NOVEMBER FIELD TRIPS

November 8th. To Pauoa Flats, under the leadership of Mace Norton. We have not been on this Tantalus trail for a long time, so meet with us at 8:30 at the Library of Hawaii.

November 22nd. To Kaneohe Marine Air Station. This time we expect to spend our time, not at the booby colony, which has few birds in it at this time of year, but about the ponds, where shore birds, and we hope, ducks may be watched. Leave the Library of Hawaii at 7:00 a.m., or meet us at the sentry box at 8:00.

NOVEMBER MEETING

November 16th, at 7:30 p.m. at the home of Mrs. Ruth Rockafellow, 2238 B Kalia Road. Business consumed our entire last meeting, so we hope to study the turnstone and sanderling this time, under the leadership of Blanche Pedley. Again there will be business to transact.

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