

# THE ELEPAIO

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Hawaii Audubon Society*



*For the Better Protection  
of Wildlife in Hawaii*

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## AUDUBON SCREEN TOURS

October was a busy month for a committee of our society, and an even busier month for our distinguished guest from the National Audubon Society, Mr. Wayne Short, Executive Secretary. Mr. Short had courage enough to come and labor with us to launch the Audubon Screen Tours, lecture-movies, in Honolulu. We rejoice in his success in arranging engagements for them with certain private schools. Other schools would like to have ordered them, but lack of auditorium facilities prevented. It is our great regret that public schools will not see them this year, and our hope that conditions will permit it another year.

An introductory set of three movies will be presented in Honolulu during the winter-spring season of 1954. Please remember the dates below, make a list of your friends who are not members, and send their names to the ticket chairman, Margaret Newman, 1523 Thurston Avenue.

We want everyone who is interested in the beautiful world outside our cities to see these superb pictures. With the almost staggering increase of population, we are beginning to wonder what will happen to the precious parts of our environment still untouched by man, or not disruptingly changed for his needs or wishes. How long can we keep what is left? Are we thinking wisely and acting wisely? What will be left for our children's children to let them know what the natural world has been? Conservation has long been the deep concern of the Audubon societies of America. These pictures dwell on that theme, obviously or subtly. Some people assume that these movie lectures will be about birds alone. Just that one topic would be endlessly interesting. But the pictures draw on the entire world of nature. Each picture is the creation of the lecturer himself, and the lecturers are top men and women naturalists of America.

The schools' program is assured. Our society's responsibility now is to let enough people know of the three evening showings to assure success. Thoughtfully, the lecturers bring movies especially for the schools, and other movies for adults. The program is as follows:

January 11th, Laurel Reynolds, WESTERN DISCOVERY  
(for the schools, FUN WITH BIRDS)

February 19th, Bert Harwell, CANADA WEST  
(for the schools, CANADA VENTURE)

April 30th, Fran William Hall, SOUTH TO SIESTA LAND  
(for the schools, MONSTERS IN MINIATURE)

Remember, Mabel Smythe Auditorium, 8:00 p.m., the dates above. Let us work vigorously to sell out the house. Aim for season tickets. If we sell enough we can arrange extra showings. The committee urges your full cooperation, especially for this first introductory year. Season tickets, \$3.60; single tickets, \$1.50.

Margaret Titcomb,  
Chairman, Audubon Screen Tour Committee

# NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF PALMYRA

By  
Frank Richardson  
(Bishop Museum)

On September 18 and 19, 1953, I was fortunate to be one of the guests of Mr. Richard Kimball on a special flight to Palmyra, some 1,000 miles south of Oahu. Palmyra is a fairly typical flat coral atoll. It is about three miles long and consists of an irregular ring of small islands, sometimes separated by channels, enclosing a large central lagoon. Mr. Kimball and others are interested in developing Palmyra recreationally and commercially, although how soon and to what extent this may be possible cannot now be said. The limited bird observations possible on this trip, barely more than half a day on the island, may not even have disclosed all of the species of birds present, but birds were seen in sufficient variety and numbers to clearly show that they would provide an important source for pleasure or study for visitors to the island, and a significant source of information as to the location of fish for sport or commercial fishermen. The most numerous birds on Palmyra are sea birds of which the following species were observed:

- Brown Booby (Sula leucogaster) Fairly common--several dozen seen. Nesting on ground next to lagoon. All had eggs, which is of particular interest for this time of year.
- Red-footed Booby (Sula sula) Quite common--several hundred seen. Nesting in low trees both by lagoon and ocean. Young were well-grown or flying.
- Frigate Bird (Fregata minor) Common--over a hundred seen. Not seen to be nesting.
- White tern (Gygis alba) Quite common--several hundred seen. Beginning to nest in large trees of eastern part of island. One fresh egg found. The beautiful white or fairy tern should always be a special attraction of Palmyra for it can be readily and closely observed in a striking forest setting.
- White-capped Noddy Tern (Anous minutus) Fairly common--over a hundred seen. This almost black tern provides strong contrast to the white tern and, like it, nests in trees, including coconut trees next the habitations. I am tentatively assuming this was the tern seen but did not collect it. It seemed clearly distinguishable from the common Noddy tern but similar to the Hawaiian Noddy.
- Sooty Tern (Sterna fuscata) Apparently a colony of these terns, or wide-awakes, could be heard across the lagoon dock, but time did not permit locating them.

Besides the sea birds, several species of shore birds were seen:

- Bristle-thighed Curlew (Numenius tahitiensis) Over 40 were seen--perhaps an unusually large number of this species.

Wandering Tattler (Heteroscelus incanus) Over 40 seen along both lagoon and ocean shores.

Ruddy Turnstone (Arenaria interpres) About 20 seen on ocean shore and reef.

Golden plover (Pluvialis dominica) Six seen on airplane runway.

Except for the mynah, one of which was seen and some 12 of which are known to have been liberated on Palmyra several years ago, no land birds occur on or have been native to the island. This is true in spite of the names of some parts of Palmyra as Whippoorwill, and Quail Islands.

I feel that no land birds should be introduced to Palmyra. The results of such introductions can never be entirely predictable and so are potentially dangerous to the birds already present. Even the mynah has not been an unqualified success in other places, as on Oahu, and its introduction on Palmyra is of questionable wisdom.

Even more strongly, I should recommend that parts of Palmyra be set aside as bird reservations if a number of people come to live on the island. Some species of birds, as of terns and boobies, may leave islands for an indeterminate number of years if their nesting areas are visited with frequency, or otherwise disturbed. The sea birds of Palmyra are probably present and some nesting goes on the year round. Consequently, I think it would be very desirable if all or most of the eastern third of Palmyra, east of the north-south causeway, and certain islands near the center of the lagoon, or in the southwest region where Sooty Terns and Brown Boobies nest, be set aside as bird reservations and only infrequent visiting allowed. The birds in such areas could usually be well observed from the edges of the areas, and the protection of the birds would insure that they would continue to be present, even if not nesting, in many other parts of the island. It could be mentioned, too, that such bird reservations would also protect the amazing edible coconut crab, which has already been dangerously reduced in numbers, but could be encouraged to increase so that it could be a dependable source of food and interest.

Editor's note: Here is a spot where conservation, if planned and undertaken now, and adhered to in the future, would save valuable creatures. One small spot where there is yet time. Let us hope that a successful effort will be made to save a part of Palmyra, let it remain as it is and has been.

BISHOP MUSEUM FELLOW, 1953/1954: Dr. Frank Richardson

The Hawaii Audubon Society congratulates itself in having the friendly interest and help of a sojourning ornithologist, Dr. Frank Richardson, who has a fellowship at Bernice P. Bishop Museum this year. Dr. Richardson is no stranger to Hawaii, having been born here! His higher education was gained in California, and he has taught in Nevada. In 1947-1948 he was exchange professor at the University of Hawaii.

To be on the side lines and observe what he does this year is going to be most interesting for us who are but amateurs. Already we feel we know him well, and are grateful for the chance of this stimulating contact.

NOTE: Age of birds.

Has any one of you wondered about the age of birds? A note in BIRD-BANDING (24:20, 1953) by O. 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)

## ORNITHOLOGICAL NOTES, MIDWAY ISLANDS, 1940

By  
Walter Donaghho  
(continued)

March 14, 1941: Having spent the last two months back in Hawaii, the following notes are offered as observations of F. C. Hadden and Myron Meyers--with thanks to them.

Hadden says the first Laysan albatross egg hatched in 63 days. The first Bonin petrel eggs were laid on January 15th, a few only; most of them were laid around February 15; another flock of petrels came in during the last of February.

The first terns appeared on March 2nd, according to both men, a large flock, flying high overhead. They flew around the part of the island occupied by the contractors' camp, circled a few times and flew out to sea. On March 8th a larger flock came in and also circled above.

Bosun birds and white terns have been on the increase; as yet no shearwaters seen.

Meyers gives the first laying date of the brown booby, February 16th; the blue-faced booby, the frigate bird and the red-footed booby around March 9th. I question the authenticity of the date for the blue-faced booby, as on two trips (my diary entry is on the 24th) to Eastern Island later, I found a booby with newly hatched young. Mr. Meyers may have mixed this with the date of the brown booby. The latter may have laid around March 9th, as an egg that I broke was nearly fresh. A single red-footed booby egg that I saw was freshly laid. I did not find any frigate bird eggs; Meyers states that he collected an egg.

Went to the area just south of the camp, where I had noted the clamour of sooty terns. They had landed; probably this is the second landing, as Hadden tells me that a landing was made on the eve of March 13th.

The Laysan albatross are almost a fourth grown. The oldest (egg laid on November 17th) is almost half grown.

A young Bonin petrel chick noted in a burrow.

March 16: Visited Eastern Island. Frigate birds were busy courting, mating, and constructing nests. Many of the males flew around with their red pouches inflated. Others, wooing their beloved ones, were spreading out and drooping their wings and ruffling up the feathers of the back and neck. Then they trembled all over as they inflated the pouch, threw back their heads, and swayed from side to side, emitting a warbling whistle resembling the war whoop of an Indian. This was followed by a rattling sound, as if shaking dried beans in a gourd.

One red-footed booby egg was found; the majority have not laid yet. Small numbers of sooties flew across the island, on to Sand Island, not stopping to hover or start wheeling here.

A grey-backed tern colony was established under the naupaka near the east shore of the island. Apparently they arrived ahead of their cousins, the sooties.

March 18: Terns were noted on the ground at one o'clock this afternoon--the first daylight landing.

March 20: The moan of a shearwater was reported by Russel Weaver--heard about one a.m. this morning.

March 23: Another trip to Eastern Island this afternoon. Sooties circled above an area at the south shore. Blue-faced booby noted sitting on a newly hatched

young. Two shearwaters seen; the moan of a shearwater heard about two a.m., evidently only one.

March 26: Spent another afternoon on Eastern Island. Noted the many wedge-tailed shearwater that come in during the afternoon, a great increase since March 23rd. At first a few pairs came in; as the afternoon lengthened, they became more and more numerous; at 5 o'clock they were streaming in.

Terns were noted wheeling over the old site west of the PAA hotel; at 6:20 p.m. they still had not landed.

April 6: Frigate birds noted on eggs, in several Eastern Island colonies. A grey-backed tern also noted on an egg in the colony near the East Point. Sooties and grey-backs noted together in a small colony that had formed on heaped up piles of sand, near the south beach and toward the west point.

April 9: Bosun birds reported on eggs, two of them. Eggs were collected as specimens. I have not seen any eggs yet, though the birds have picked their nest sites. The report seems authentic, as I was shown the eggs.

April 11: A white tern noted on an egg on Eastern Island. The colony of grey-back terns near the east point is settling down to housekeeping; many eggs laid. The colony has grown considerably in numbers. Two smaller colonies have formed to the north, about 25 to 50 yards away.

Wedge-tailed shearwaters on Eastern are extremely common, and spend the day on the ground under the Scaevola, sitting in pairs and making love to each other. A pair of Christmas shearwaters also seen, the male trying to copulate with the female. He was continually hooking his bill around her neck, standing at right angles to her, and trying to climb up on her back. The female objected, running aside.

A brown booby was seen with a newly hatched chick.

April 14: A small flock of sooty terns has been hovering since last night over the area near the mess hall, the canteen and the first two barracks. Could it be the flock that nested in this area last season?

Several more flocks have arrived over Sand Island. The large flock over the site just south of the camp has grown to enormous proportions. From a distance, one sees a large cloud of terns hovering low in the sky, near evening. It is a great thrill to watch them land for the night. At about six o'clock the flock lowers and hovers close to the ground. The air is full of terns. They set up a great clamour now as they dip for the landing, rise and dip again. The din is so great that one can hear nothing else except a shout. The flocks--the great flock is made up of many smaller ones--dip as one several times prior to making a landing, several of the birds swooping down to within a foot of the ground. But when a bird finally lands, the rest of the flock pours down around it, as molasses pours out of a pitcher, in a growing circle about the first tern. It is a thrilling experience indeed to see it, one of the many red letter experiences I have had in this bird paradise.

April 16: Noted one egg in the small grey-backed tern colony that is associated with the sooty terns on Eastern Island.

April 19: Two colonies of sooties are now settled in the area just south of the camp. They are on the ground now, nearly all day, but domestic affairs apparently have not started yet. The terns still rise in the afternoon to hover in the air.

Two new flocks were noted hovering above the dune line on the mid-western side of the island. One colony settled in a semi-cleared area just south of the high central area of the island. The South Point colony has recently come in, as it is small.

A half-grown Bonin petrel chick was noted, with the contour feathers of the back developed.

April 20: About all the colonies on Sand Island seem to be in now. Three groups were noted flying over the eastern end of the island, east of the central colonies; one was the group already noted on April 13th, one a colony that nested at East Point, just inside the dune line. The third nested to the south of this, near the former Engineer and Marine camp. As these areas are now torn up for construction purposes, it will be interesting to see where these colonies settle.

Three groups of terns were seen above Eastern Island.

April 23: A pair of wedge-tailed shearwaters were seen undergoing sexual operations on Eastern Island. Many have already dug their burrow nests.

Most of the birds are in various stages of nesting. The blue-faced booby is the most advanced, one pair nursing a half-grown chick. Nearly all are nursing chicks much smaller. Fairy terns, bosun birds are setting. There are still quite a few frigate birds which have not laid eggs yet. I am not aware that the rail and finch have started nesting yet, though I have seen several rails courting-done by the male pursuing the female.

April 25: One more flock of sooty terns has arrived on Eastern Island and is circling above a site in the center of the island that is now an oasis between landing runways.

High seas have washed away a large portion of the south beach, forming in some places a steep bank four or five feet in height. The surf has endangered some of the young goonies on the upper part of the beach. It has, in fact, taken a small toll of young. I saw five or six that had been drowned. Several others were just above the highwater line, and still others next in line for the ocean to claim. A bad storm on Midway would take a heavy toll of these unfortunate birds.

April 28: Bulwer's petrel streaming in over Eastern Island in fair numbers. Two nests of brown boobies contained chicks. The birds spent at least six weeks incubating the eggs.

(to be continued)

#### FIELD NOTES, OAHU

On October 25, eight of us, including two new boys, gathered at the Library at 7:00 a.m. to go to the tide lands at the Pearl Harbor West Loch at Waipahu. At the end of the road the first sight of birds was a large flock of Hawaiian Stilt feeding in the shallow water, which promised well for our day. This is always a delightful sight for the contrast of black and white of the individual stilt seems intensified when observed in a group. Among the stilt were a few pintail ducks and plover. To the right, on the dry land we had a good view of the shore birds, including Ruddy turnstones, sanderlings, Pacific golden plovers, black bellied plovers, and tattlers. This was the first opportunity some of us had to observe closely the sanderling and black bellied plover; the latter continues to be an identifying puzzle to me.

Low tide occurred at noon so four of us (the second car of four had to leave early picked up wooden boxes from a nearby dump, and waded out to sit beneath a mangrove tree. This not only proved to be a good blind, but protected us from a fiery sun, and its branches served as a base to keep Mace Norton's seat (a broken down pail) from sinking below water. For three hours we sat with our feet in the water, but it was well worth while. As the sand bars slowly appeared in the receding tide, the birds came closer and closer. Our most rewarding sight of the day was the shovellers which finally came so near to us we could clearly see all of the identifying marks of both the male and female. The stilts were as noisy as ever, but in the background we heard light sweet bird notes which we thought might belong to the feeding plover. Several auku'u were feeding on the bars, and one coot swam into our view. We were puzzled that the Ruddy turnstone confined themselves to one sand bar only, unfortunately some distance from us. We saw a few pintails feeding, but a larger group continued to fly around in a loose kind of formation, occasionally landing, then taking off again.

On returning to Honolulu in the early afternoon we stopped at Moanalua Gardens and were disappointed at the lowness of the water. It was our impression that plans are underway to drain the pond. Two gallinule were seen in the bushes, and about 18 coot were on the water.

Bird count for the day: Stilt 300 plus; Pintail 44; Ruddy turnstones 13; black bellied plover 12; Auku'u 6; sanderling 14; Shoveller 18; coot 19; gallinule 2; a mixed flock of plover, turnstone, and tattlers 68; and rice birds, 25.

Grace Gossard

#### FIELD TRIP, NOVEMBER 9TH, 1953

"A southerly wind and a cloudy sky" did not look too promising for a trip to Pauoa Flats, but nature was merciful, and the rain stayed in the valleys. Mr. McGuire, whose duties kept him from being with us, met us at the start of the trail to wish us godspeed, and Mace Norton ably assumed the leadership.

Tantalus, where vegetation is still lush and green, was a welcome relief from the rest of the drought-parched island. Guavas lay in a colorful but somewhat slippery carpet upon the muddy trail. The eight of us had the area to ourselves, meeting only two small boys and, near the top, a little group of hikers. Vandals had evidently preceded us, for the trail was littered with paper, which we, like good citizens buried. Worse still, one bed of ti had been hacked to bits, the tops thrown back upon the mutilated stems. Paper-bark trees had been ruthlessly and deeply slashed, the lovely soft bark torn off in great pieces, only to be discarded, sheet by sheet, along the way. Yellow ginger had been picked, then tossed aside. One wonders why the beauty, the heavenly peace and quiet of such a spot, cannot reach even such insensitive souls as these?

Most of the day the wind was too strong for good birding. Leiiothrix were heard all along the way, white-eyes and rice birds were not uncommon. One little elepaio alone made the day worth while, for she put on the sort of show that only an elepaio can, coming within arm's length, apparently welcoming our presence as she searched for insects.

The count was made mostly by ear, and certainly incomplete.

Leiothrix	21	Elepaio	5
White-eye	12	Kentucky cardinal	1
Rice bird	17		

G. H.

## 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."

CREDIT for the delightful article in the October ELEPAIO on an expedition to Moku Manu should be given to Robert Pyle. We regret that his name as author was inadvertently omitted last month.

## DECEMBER ACTIVITIES

### FIELD TRIP

December 13th. To Pa Lehua. Birding is always hopeful on this trail, sometimes excellent, sometimes only fair, but the scenery is always magnificent, and worth the trip alone. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 7:00 a.m. Please note the change of time. Mace Norton will lead, as Mr. McGuire, who usually takes the first trip, will not be with us, due to press of duties.

There will be no other field trip this month, the Christmas count on December 27th, taking the place of the usual second trip. This is the peak of our activities during the year. Final plans will be formulated at the meeting on December 21st. Come, wangle an assignment to your favorite trail, and get in on the fun!

### MEETING

December 21, at 7:30 p.m. at the home of Mrs. Ruth Rockafellow, 2238 B Kalia Road. This is the annual meeting, at which officers for 1954 will be elected. This, with completion of plans for the Christmas count, will consume the evening. Make your plans to be present.

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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