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HAWAII'S BIRDS IN THEIR HOMES: HOW TO SAVE THEM FROM EXTINCTION
By George C. Munro

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IX. Birds of the Open Country in Hawaii

During the winter season migratory shore birds are much in evidence in Hawaii. The pasture and fallow lands are favorite foraging ground for them. The cheery cry of the Pacific golden plover, generally known here as the kolea, can be heard as the scattered birds over the country rise in the air and gather into large flocks. Their habit is to scatter over the land to feed, but repair to the coast in company generally in the evening. It is presumed they go there to drink at the brackish ponds and seepages on the beach. This habit spelt destruction to them when shot as game birds in the last half century. Blinds were built by the ponds they visited, decoys place out in the water and the birds shot as they approached the decoys. It was a poor requital for the very valuable work they were doing on the pasture and agricultural lands. However, it is hoped now that all that belongs to the past, and this valuable bird will be protected over the whole Pacific. Then it will frequent our city lawns and help control destructive insects.

Accompanying the kolea in large flocks is the ruddy turnstone or akekeke. Its habit is different from the kolea. It feeds over the ground in flocks, turning over stones and rubbish with its bill to get at the insects hidden under them. When disturbed the flock rises in a body and is quite spectacular as it wheels in the air showing the white markings to greater advantage than when on the ground.

The curlew is another migrant that frequented the pasture lands, especially of Molokai. It seems to have disappeared from the main islands, probably from shooting. Quite a number still frequent Niihau, where all wild birds are protected.

The Hawaiian owl (pueo), which, unlike most other owls, flies around in the daytime, is a useful bird and destroys large numbers of mice. Its young come in succession, hatching evidently starts when the first egg is laid. I found a nest with an egg and several chicks grading in size from newly hatched to a young bird nearly grown. The owl was a sacred bird to the ancient Hawaiians. Once on Lanai my children had a tame owl. Its wing had been hurt and it was unable to fly. It was free, but came regularly to the kitchen demanding food. It was quite able to take care of itself from dogs and cats. It held them in defiance and they were afraid of its sharp claws. It would crouch, spread its wing so that only its eyes and bill showed between them, a truly menacing attitude.

Of the imported birds, the mynah is the most conspicuous on the open lands. It is a great forager for food and uses every avenue to obtain it. It follows grass fires and agricultural implements to get insects killed or disturbed. Stock are attended to get the insects on them or disturbed at their feet. Despite its faults, it is a valuable bird.

Skylarks and linnets, both good singing birds, frequent the grass lands. The linnets fly to the trees when disturbed, but the lark stays in the open, even to making its nest in a little hollow in the ground. Chinese, Mongolian and Japanese pheasants are more or less mixed by interbreeding. Sometimes only an expert can see the traces of the different species, especially between the Chinese and Mongolian.

California valley quail and the more recently acclimatized Sino-Japanese quail both forage on the open lands. The latter stays wholly in the open, the valley quail favors tree growth to some extent. More recent introductions of quail and partridges have been made but are not well established yet. The rock pigeon reverted from a tame bird to a wild state with the Chinese dove and barwinged dove, are all ground feeders and frequent the pasture lands, especially the dry sections. The rock pigeon makes its home in the shelter of cliff faces and flies to the open lands to feed almost entirely on weed seeds though I have found wire worms in the stomach of the barwinged dove.

X. Terns of the Hawaiian Group

There are no seagulls in Hawaii, though gulls straggle here from time to time, especially the Point Barrow or glaucous gull. Attempts to introduce gulls have been made but unsuccessfully, no species of gull having become established.

Of terns, however, closely allied to gulls, we have six species: the graybacked, sooty, Necker Island, noddy, Hawaiian and white tern.

The graybacked tern has a wide distribution in the Pacific but does not occur in such large numbers as the sooty. It is present but not common in the main group. It lays one egg on the bare sand, even when there is little shelter for the young from the marauding frigate bird. This may be one of the reasons that it does not reach the number of the sooty.

The Hawaiian subspecies of the sooty tern is distributed in large numbers over tripart of the Pacific. On Sand Island of Midway, where there was only one small colony in 1891, there are now eight or nine colonies running into hundreds of thousands. It is adept at selecting nesting sites, preferably where there is scattered grass tufts among which the young birds take refuge from the attacking frigates which must have clear ground to swoop down and seize them without alighting. The young when hatched are almost invisible as they lie prone on the sand. I once saw a colony about three quarters of a mile long. At one end there were chicks almost full grown, and at the other, chicks just hatching. At another place there were sitting birds at one end, and at the other a screaming mass of birds on the wing preparing to lay. Successive arriving flocks laid their eggs at the end of the column. Consequently there might be birds of all ages in sequence through the column from birds nearly ready to fly to eggs just hatching; or hatched birds at one end and fresh eggs at the other. On Midway these birds congregate in masses and are oblivious to close passing traffic. Only when intruded on will they take wing. They will stand by their egg and scold vehemently and even peck at one's fingers if stretched down to them.

The Necker Island tern, or little gray tern, is a beautiful little gray bird. It is smaller than the white tern and has the same familiar habit of flying close to inspect the visitor. The Rothschild expedition saw it only off the north coast of Kauai

and at Nihoa Island. They almost came aboard the schooner there. I saw them on the Line islands in 1924 and 1938 but in very small numbers. If it could be established on islands off Oahu it would add to the beauty and interest of their wild life.

On no island have I seen the common noddy tern in such numbers as on Manana off Makapuu Head. It makes a nice show there and should be carefully preserved.

The Hawaiian tern is about half the size of the noddy and nearly the same color: dark body and whitish forehead. It is the only sea bird that fishes to any extent near the shores of the main islands. All the others go to sea or out in the channels. It follows the fishing sampans to pick up the small fish the fisherman throw overboard as a lure for the tuna. The white tern I have already treated on at length in a former article.

Most of the terns get their food by dashing down and grabbing the fish on the surface of the water, hitting the water with a splash but not diving under. The white tern is credited with catching its food in the air as the small fish jumps from the water. But how it can pack nine or ten fish crosswise in its bill as it catches them is somewhat of a puzzle. It is not only a beautiful bird, but a clever one.

These species should all be encouraged and remain a part of our offshore bird life.

To be continued

N.B. Parts VII and VIII of this series were combined in the December 1955 issue but not so marked.

FIELD NOTES:

Field Trip - Sunday, November 13, 1955: Present - Grace Gossard (driver), Ruth Rockafellow and Ed Wilson, malahini from Annapolis, Maryland.

At 8:15, those present left the Library of Hawaii, and in succession, stopped for bird counts at the Damon Estate, Salt Lake, Makalapa and the mud flats southwest of Waipahu about 10:00 a.m. (low tide), then for lunch to vicinity of Kaena Point close under the Waianae Range returning via Waialua and the "Kam" Highway to town.

From the railroad bridge below Waipahu were seen two native teen-agers each in makeshift outrigger-type canoes (sheet metal and boards) heading downstream to a landing on the mud flats there, where they stalked birds with slingshots, using bottled pellets for ammunition. Half an hour later, they returned upstream. No definite kill was seen. This data is submitted to the group for consideration and possible further action.

Included below are forty Kentucky cardinals counted in five minutes, 5:35 - 5:40 p.m. They are only part of a flight, passing twice daily over Moanalua Ridge Housing, one in the morning toward Pearl Harbor to feed and the other within the half hour before sunset returning to roost among the cactus above Salt Lake.

AREAS

	<u>Damon Estate</u>	<u>Salt Lake</u>	<u>Makalapa</u>	<u>P.H. Mud Flats</u>	<u>Other Areas</u>	<u>Total</u>
Pintail	25	8	2	72		107
Shoveller			5	7		12
Coot	7	225		8		240
Pacific Golden Plover	2	7	3	42	11	65
Wandering Tattler	3		1		3	7
Ruddy Turnstone				4		4
Sanderling				16		16
Stilt	5			236		241
Barred Dove	2	5	3			10
Kentucky Cardinal			7		40	47
White-eye		3	5	1		9
Total	44	248	26	386	54	758
# of Species	6	5	7	8	3	11

Ed Wilson

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Field Trip - November 20, 1955: Tom McGuire led a group of 25 over a trail in the lower Pa Lehua district which was new country for many of us. We followed the road about 2 miles down from the radio station, then cut back to the right on a seldom used trail which took us through some beautifully wooded and densely foliated hills. Tom explained that a good deal of this area was planted by boys in the CCC program in the 30's. Lunch was eaten at the fork of the road and trail which gave some of us an opportunity to gather macademia nuts from trees which are now large and fairly productive.

Birding was at a minimum although we observed the white-eyes, leiiothrix, doves, and American cardinals. We kept our ears tuned for the bush warbler (one heard) or a sight of the apapane and amakihi but apparently they do not tend to descend as low as we were. No pheasant were flushed on the road up which was a little unusual.

Grace Gossard

JANUARY ACTIVITIES:

FIELD TRIPS: January 15 - To Aiea. Meet in front of the Library of Hawaii at 8:00 a.m.

January 29 - To be announced later.
(NOTE CHANGE OF DATES ON BIRD WALK)

MEETING: January 16 - At the Aquarium at 7:30 p.m. Mr. Robert L. Pyle and Mr. Joe King will show slides of their recent trips to Mexico, Marquesas Island, and Christmas Island.

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