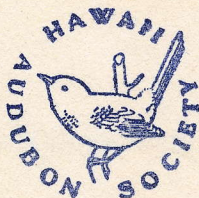


THE ELEPAIO

Journal of the
Hawaii Audubon Society



For the Better Protection
of Wildlife in Hawaii

Volume 16, Number 9

March 1956

ORNITHOLOGY IN HAWAII By Grenville Hatch

With this issue we initiate a series of short articles designed better to acquaint us with some of the famous names and personalities in the ornithological history of Hawaii. The resume of the first years is necessarily brief, as details are lamentably absent.

Indeed, misfortune and shadows surround the early attempts to compile information about Hawaii's birds, from the discovery of the islands in 1799 for nearly one hundred years. Many of the specimens collected by Captain Cook's expedition have been lost, and when available do not give the exact locality where found, and the drawings made by William Ellis, assistant surgeon to both vessels, are crudely done, in some instances almost unrecognizable. Still, this formed the beginning of our knowledge, and upon these notes and specimens the first list of Hawaiian birds was compiled by John Latham, in his "General Synopsis of Birds", 1781-85.

Not until 1824 was another attempt made to study the natural history of the islands, this being the sad occasion when H.M.S. "Blonde" brought home the bodies of King Kamehameha II and his Queen, who had died in London. Attached to the ship was Andrew Bloxam, who was "something of a naturalist", and who was supposed to add an appendix on the natural history of the islands to the account of the journey. Again the shadows descend on this attempt. All agree that it is completely inadequate, through reasons that at this date are obscure. One fact does appear - Oahu at that time was blessed with thrushes. Before the next accounting, they had become extinct, with not so much as a skin to prove their existence.

About ten years later J. K. Townsend and Thomas Nuttall, famous American naturalists, during a three months' stay on Oahu and Kauai, did collecting, but unfortunately did no publishing of observations, or even lists of birds - a great loss, as both were deemed excellent observers. Townsend's collection went for the most part to the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia. Audubon's name here appears, as he also received some skins. Townsend worked for most of the next two years with a German collector, Deppe, who sent his collection to the Berlin Museum where they were classified by Lichtenstein.

The next mischance came when most of the birds collected by Charles Pickering and Titian Peale, attached to the Wilkes Exploring Expedition of 1840, were lost in the wreck of the ship "Peacock". Nor was that the last - only a few copies of Peale's report had been distributed when the rest were destroyed by fire. Some years later, in 1852, Fr. Hartlaub published a summary, based on Cassin's revision of this work, which listed 30 species, only 25 of which must be considered correct.

From here on, the picture begins to improve. Professor Alfred Newton was appointed Professor of Zoology at Cambridge University in 1866. His intense interest in ornithology resulted in many valuable publications, and was responsible for much of the work done here

in the islands, as will be seen later. Nearly twenty years later Hans F. Gadow joined Newton at Cambridge, collaborated with him in his books, and studied the anatomy of Hawaiian birds.

Here in Hawaii at the same time arose men who were interested in birds, J.D. Mills of Hilo, whose valuable collections are to be found in the Bishop Museum, and at Mrs. Peter Lee's, at the Volcano; Brother Newell, a Catholic lay brother from Maui, whose collection, after being catalogued by William Alanson Bryan, went to St. Louis College, now dispersed among other collections; Francis Gay, who studied the birds of Kauai in particular; Sanford B. Dole and others, among whom was Valdemar Knudsen, a sketch of whose life follows.

+++++

VALDEMAR KNUDSEN

By Hazel Peppin

Hawaii was fortunate, when by a series of accidents, it drew to its shores ----- Valdemar Knudsen. This young and restless Norseman landed at Koloa, Kauai in 1857. Previously, he had become a seasoned traveler after "wanderlust" lured him from his home in Norway to New York, and thence to California during the "Gold Rush" days.

Arriving at Kauai he at once fell captive to the charms of Island life; tropic beauty, tranquility, and the spirit of aloha among its people, for him, had instant appeal. The strange language challenged his linguistic ability and at the end of the first day, he had mastered 200 Hawaiian words with the help of a friendly and willing native.

He lost no time setting forth on horseback for an exploratory tour of Kauai. It was a solitary venture but most rewarding, for he was able to appreciate to the fullest the rich gifts the Island had to offer. Kauai, he decided, was to be his home.

A recurrence of "Chagres River Fever" which had first struck when he crossed the Isthmus of Panama, led him to the dry lands of Mana for the location of his home. Singularly, he was able to get a thirty year lease of 100,000 acres of Crown Lands which made him the King's Agent or Konohiki of West Kauai. This gave him tremendous prestige with the populace who called him "Kanuka". His was a paternalistic domain-----a cattle ranch, although tobacco and sugar were also grown at different periods.

Ranch life was much to Kanuka's liking, for among other benefits, there was opportunity to explore more intensively the lagoons and valleys, and he acquired new interests in the trees, ferns, and birds of Kauai. Mana was admirably equipped for the study of bird life. Extending toward Waimea was a wide lagoon teeming with shore birds. There were thousands of moha, manu koloa, alae, and the aeo or stilt, which bears his name. Some trails took him to the rim of Waimea Canyon where large Koae birds never failed to fascinate him as they floated far below. One day he followed a long unused trail which ended in a lovely little glen. Under a huge ohia tree was a grass shack called Halemanu. He learned that it was here the royal bird catchers had snared the o-o, the mamu, and the iiwi, for the royal feather capes. Kanuka was delighted. He had found the site for his new summer home. It was not long before he was spending his weekends at the rebuilt grass shack of Halemanu, where he could study to better advantage his birds and ferns.

He was visited by Dr. Vavara and Dr. Hillebrand who had heard of his botanical research and he was urged to send them all the new specimens he could find. Collecting birds became an additional hobby and through Knudsen's efforts, Dr. Stejneger of the Smithsonian Institute received many specimens of Hawaiian birds as well as plants.

During forty-one years of residence, Valdemar Knudsen contributed much to Island life besides his interest in natural history. His talents and accomplishments were many and he can well be placed among the leaders of 19th century Hawaii.

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

Published in the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, July 28 - August 25, 1945

XI. Sea Birds in the Main Group

Before predacious animals were brought to the Hawaiian Islands at least five species of the petrel family nested almost unmolested in the main group and little islands off the coasts. These birds were the wedge-tailed shearwater, Newell's shearwater, dark-rumped petrel, Bulwer's petrel and the white-rumped storm petrel. There may have been others, such as the Bonin Island petrel and Tristram's petrel, but there is no authentic evidence that they nested in the main group. Man did interfere with them to some extent, and may have exterminated them in some localities, but they were in no danger of extinction. But the introduction of cats, rats and mongooses meant the end for some of them.

The albatrosses, in the same order as the petrels, may have nested in the main group before the Hawaiians came. The Laysan albatross still comes occasionally to Niihau and a pair visited Makahuana point at Koloa, Kauai, on March 19, 1945.

The wedge-tailed shearwater is a subspecies with other subspecies nesting at the Kermadec Islands and on islands off the coast of Mexico. Our shearwater extends along the Hawaiian chain, to the Marshall and Line Islands. It is known and much hated in some places for its weird wailing voice which interferes with sleep of weary workers on outlying islands. One of its interesting characteristics is its color phases. In the Kermadec Islands near New Zealand, it is wholly a brown bird, on islands off the coast of Mexico it is divided between brown and white breasted, on Jarvis Island in a small colony brown breasts seem to be fairly common. On islands off Oahu five per cent of the birds are brown breasted. One brown breasted was taken by the Rothschild expedition on an islet of the French Frigate shoal, but none have ever been reported from Midway. Another interesting characteristic is the regularity of its egg laying, conforming in my experience within a few days on islands 1,000 miles apart and over an interval of half a century. Several thousand were leg banded on islands off the coast of Oahu, 2,000 on the little island of Popoia before the war, but no return from a distance has been taken and we have no idea how far it goes to sea between breeding seasons.

Newell's shearwater (ao) if it exists at all now,* furnishes one of the most tragic histories of our seabirds. It is the only Hawaiian sea bird which enjoys the distinction of being a species in itself, not being classed as a subspecies with some bird of other seas. We have records of its nesting habits on Hawaii, Maui, Molokai and Kauai. It nested in burrows at the foot of cliffs at a medium elevation. The mongoose has probably exterminated it from all the large islands except perhaps Kauai and Niihau, although there is no certain record that it ever nested on Niihau. There are few preserved specimens in existence.

The dark rumped petrel, uau of the Hawaiians, is a subspecies with another at the Galapagos Islands. It was probably more numerous than the ao. I was told that on its arrival at Pelekunu Valley, Molokai, in the evening it darkened the sky. Now it is not seen there. Originally the young birds before being fledged were considered a delicacy, kapu to the common people and reserved for the chiefs and so the birds were preserved as undoubtedly only the young were taken. When the kapus were removed the common people

* Since the foregoing was written, an ao was found at Aiea, May 24, 1954, and brought into the zoo, where it was identified by Dr. Frank Richardson. The bird was apparently uninjured, and took food, but died about a month later. This assures us that the ao is still breeding somewhere in our islands. (Richardson, Frank. THE AUK 72:412, 1955)

had no check on their use and old birds were taken as well as chicks. At Pelekunu it was a hard climb up 5000 feet high cliffs to obtain them, and the hunters would want all they could get for it, especially, as there was little flesh food in isolated Pelekunu. Between this and the mongoose the bird has probably been completely exterminated on Molokai. It may still exist near Mount Waialeale on Kauai, but no one knows of the old nesting places. It nested in holes in the ground in the forest at about 500 feet elevation. Thus the three species had each a zone to itself, the wedge-tailed shearwater at the shoreline, Newell's at about 1000 feet and the uau at the higher elevations.*

Bulwer's petrel has a wide range. This gentle little dark brown bird still nests on islands off Oahu, but rats menace it where they gain access. The Hawaiian white-rumped storm petrel is also a Hawaiian subspecies. Very little known of it. The Gay and Robinson collection had some specimens of young birds found at the foot of inland cliffs, where they had fallen when leaving their nests in the cliff face, attempting to fly. A specimen picked up on the beach near Makaweli, Kauai, was given to me and is in the Bishop Museum. It evidently bred on Kauai, as its infant down was still clinging to the ends of the feathers. In some of the petrels and albatrosses the down remains fixed on the ends of the feathers till they are nearly full grown. However, I doubt if the bird goes to sea in that condition, as the full grown feathers are waterproof, but the down wets easily. Occasionally individuals have been reported in the channels and at sea, but the only instance of it being seen in numbers that I know of was by the Rothschild Expedition on August 14, 1891, after sighting the north side of Kauai. My journal says, "---the white-rumped storm petrel were very numerous."

* Several uaua were found on Hawaii by Baldwin and Fisher (CONDOR, 51:231, 1949) and by David Woodside, in 1954. The same year Dr. Richardson found and reported a nesting colony in a cliff in the crater of Haleakala, Maui.

NEWS NOTES:

Ruth Rockafellow has received letters from two of our old friends - Helen Chambers and Richard Kleen. Helen, who has recently returned from a European tour, enclosed an interesting account of her trip. She has accepted a position in New York City, which she reports a stimulating place to live. Birding in Central Park, Helen?

Dick Kleen will be remembered as one of the enthusiastic birders in the service here during the war. He is now living on the Eastern shore of Maryland, and says in part, "I live on a peninsula jutting out into Chesapeake Bay. Water is a constant companion and the water birds are constantly in sight and hearing from October to April. Thousands of Whistling Swan, Old Squaw, Scoters, Golden-eye, Baldpate and Blacks. We are just far South enough to get birds like the Chuck-wills-widow and Brown-headed Nuthatch and just far North enough to pick up some of the winter wanderers such as the Crossbills, Evening Grosbeak and Goshawk."

Dick modestly makes no mention of it, but he is Ornithologist for the State of Maryland, and we find from "Maryland Birdlife", a most interesting publication, that he is president of the Maryland Ornithological Society. Both Helen and Dick inquire about their old friends, and send greetings.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The February issue neglected to give credit to the Hilo Tribune Herald for permission to reprint Mrs. Baldwin's article on the Volcano Christmas count. Our apologies!

MARCH ACTIVITIES:

FIELD TRIPS: March 11 - To Kaneohe Marine Air Station to determine the present status of the boobies, and to observe shore birds and waterfowl. Meet in front of the Library of Hawaii at 8:00 a.m.

March 25 - To Pa Lehua upper trail to listen to the singing of the bush warbler. Meet in front of the Library of Hawaii at 8:00 a.m.

+++++

MEETING: March 19 - At the Aquarium at 7:30 p.m. Paul Breese, Director of the Honolulu Zoo, will talk on various aspects of zoo life, and show slides of some interesting zoo inhabitants.

HAWAII AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS:

President:	Mr. Charles Hanson
Vice-Presidents:	Miss Grace Gossard
	Mr. Al Labrecque
Secretary:	Miss Margaret Newman
Treasurer:	Mrs. Blanche A. Pedley
Editor:	Miss Grenville Hatch
THE ELEPAIO	

MAILING ADDRESS: P.O. Box 5032, Honolulu 14, Hawaii

DUES: Regular - \$2.00 per annum
 Junior (18 years and under) - \$1.00 per annum
 Life - \$50.00

DUES FOR 1956 ARE NOW PAYABLE