

# THE ELEPAIO

Journal of the  
Hawaii Audubon Society



For the Better Protection  
of Wildlife in Hawaii

VOLUME 17, NUMBER 12

JUNE 1957

With the following biography of George C. Munro, written by his daughter, Ruby Catherine, we bring the series of articles on Hawaiian ornithologists to a close. It is regrettable that not all who have made contributions to our knowledge of Hawaiian birds have been included; some, perhaps, through oversight or ignorance on the part of the editor, in other cases, extensive research on the part of several librarian members failed to locate any information. This was particularly true in the case of Scott Wilson, whose book still remains one of our chief sources of information. The editors will be glad to receive biographical information on any ornithologist who has been omitted from our series.

We feel that it is fitting that Mr. Munro's biography should be the concluding one. Others have come to the islands, made their contributions and left, but Mr. Munro's life has been, and still is, identified with the study and preservation of Hawaiian birds.

Editor

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GEORGE C. MUNRO  
Associate Ornithologist

By Ruby C. Munro

On many occasions I have watched my father open his old-fashioned trunk in which he kept his bird specimens and as a true naturalist lovingly unfold each rare specimen of its light wrapping - that friends might see the beautiful birds of his collection.

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George Campbell Munro was destined to follow his maternal grandparents' pioneering spirit and travel to distant lands. Jessie and Eachaunn (Hector) Sutherlands, of hardy Highland Scotch descent, were among those who left "home" in quest of "a new and promised land". The group reached Nova Scotia, and lived there for thirty years. Then they built ships and sailed them with their families aboard, to Australia and on to New Zealand. Speaking their original Gaelic, they formed a unique settlement on the North Island. It was in Wairoa South, now Clevedon, thirty miles from Auckland, that George was born on May 10, 1866.

George showed an interest in natural history and experimentation when very young. This early interest proved to become a lifelong hobby. He learned to skin and mount birds before he was fourteen from limited sources of information, before he saw a book on the subject. He perfected his technique in preserving, mounting, and preparing cabinet specimens by using Montague Brown's book on "Taxidermy" as a reference. From

then on his collection of New Zealand skins began to grow. This collection which was composed of some of the most beautiful and unique birds of New Zealand, is now in the Memorial Museum of the First World War in the City of Auckland.

Having little interest in school as such, he left school at fifteen and went to work on his father's farm. There he was in his element, searching for specimens or working in his little "museum" in all of his spare time. Forty-six beetles collected by him when a young man were described and named as new to science by Captain Thomas Broun in his "Manual of New Zealand Coleoptera", published by the New Zealand Government in 1893.

Nature held an endless fascination for him. He studied constantly such books as Lyell's "Principles of Geology", works of Darwin, Bates and Wallace. He dreamed of travel.

His first real opportunity to travel came in 1890 when he was invited to join an expedition planned by the Honorable Walter Rothschild to collect bird specimens in Hawaii for his famous Tring Collection in England. This collection is now in the American Museum. The party, under the leadership of Collector Henry C. Palmer, collected specimens on Kauai, on the islands of the French Frigate Shoals, Laysan, Lisiansky, and Midway, and on Hawaii from Kona to Waimea. Part of his remuneration for this work was a pair of specimens of each of the common birds. As some of these birds became rare and some extinct, the collection became valuable.

The trip to Midway was made on a forty ton schooner, the "Kaalokai", skippered by Captain F. D. Walker. The ship was not very seaworthy and as it was out of sight of land for twenty-four days the trip might have proved disastrous but under the good seamanship of the Captain, the party arrived back in Honolulu without mishap.

When his work with the expedition ended, Mr. Munro had planned to return to his home. There was a depression in New Zealand at the time and as he had been offered a position as Overseer on the Gay and Robinson Ranch at Makaweli, Kauai, he decided to change his plans and make Hawaii his home. He worked his way back to New Zealand and returned several months later with his bride, the former Miss Jane Wright Tait of the City of Auckland. They settled at Kekapua, Makaweli. Here Mr. Munro had an opportunity to follow his studies as in his work he spent many hours riding horseback over the open country and through the forest. At Makaweli he gained much experience in the grazing industry and in handling cattle in Hawaii.

During this period he met Dr. R.C.L. Perkins, Entomologist, bird lover, and student of Hawaiian fauna. A very real friendship developed which continued throughout life. Mr. Munro gathered much information from this very intelligent and gentle man.

In 1899, after seven years with the very fine Gay and Robinson families of Kauai, C. Brewer and Company offered Mr. Munro the management of the Molokai Ranch of about 80,000 acres. The Molokai Ranch was in an almost hopeless, rundown and undeveloped condition. In addition to this in 1901 the American Sugar Company's plantation of about 10,000 acres of the same estate, failed and all of its interests on Molokai were put under the ranch management. This added to the many problems which already existed. Mr. Munro worked tirelessly to make the ranch a success and in 1905 he had the great satisfaction of seeing the American Sugar Company starting to pay dividends and to pay off its debt.

On Molokai, needless to say, there was very little time for the study of natural history, but breaking in "the wilderness" brought almost as much satisfaction.

The honey bee industry on Molokai was started by Mr. Munro during these years.

By the end of 1906 New Zealand was booming. With his wife and family of five he returned to his home land and settled on a 200 acre farm. A little collecting was done here and some birds were added to his collection.

The farm held promise and was interesting, but the strong draw of Hawaii, the lure of the wide open ranges, and the fascination of working with the new country were irresistible, and in August 1911, he accepted the management of the Lanai Company's Cattle Ranch on the Island of Lanai, and returned to Hawaii.

On Lanai the opportunities for the study of natural history were exceptionally good. The small area of rain forest and also the remnants of dry forest were centrally situated and Mr. Munro was able to study them when patrolling the lands under his management. Lanai proved to be a paradise for the study of wildlife. He collected birds, landshells, insects, and botanical specimens of its very interesting flora. His Lanai Botanical collection has proved of much value to botanists. In appreciation of his work a Genus *Munroidendron* was named for him.

In the early days on Lanai the nearest doctor was at Lahaina, Maui, fourteen miles on horseback and three hours by sampan, away. There were no policemen on the island. As Manager, Mr. Munro made and kept his own law and gave what medical assistance he could. He managed the ranch with a rigid discipline but he was so fair in his dealings with the cowboys that they loved and respected him. Many of their domestic problems were also brought to him, the solving of which required courage and patience. One story he tells concerns a Mexican who threatened his Luna with a long bladed knife. After long persuasion the Mexican drew the knife out of one of the legs of his trousers and gave it up for safekeeping. Mr. Munro kept the knife in his office for two weeks at which time the man returned for it. It was given back to him and there was no more trouble.

From 1911 to 1920 he collected native birds on Lanai for the Bishop Museum under special permit. He also resumed mounting birds and prepared a number of cabinets.

In 1919 he was appointed Honorary Associate in Ornithology with the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum and furnished a report to this institution each year. His "outer office" was an interesting retreat. Scientific books, bulletins, and leaflets were on the shelves: there were collections of Hawaiian artifacts, and landshells: drying plant specimens and various grasses hung from the rafters in one corner: insect killing bottles, specimens of insects and old bones filled all other available space. A portable typewriter was on his desk.

In 1917 the Island of Lanai was sold to Frank and Harry Baldwin. The Ranch was sold again to the Hawaiian Pineapple Company in 1922.

In 1924 a three week trip to the Equatorial Islands, Howland and Baker, was made to preserve specimens for the Bishop Museum's share of the Whitney South Sea Bird Collecting Expedition. This trip was made on the U.S. M.S. Whippoorwill under the command of Lt. Com. Samuel Wilder King, now Governor of the Territory of Hawaii.

It was about this time that Mr. Munro sold his beautiful collection of Hawaiian birds to the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum. His smaller collections were turned over to the museum at the same time.

In 1934 he retired from active management of the Lanai Ranch and moved to Honolulu, Oahu. He was now able to spend as much time as he pleased on his interesting "hobby" although his retirement wrote "finis" to the life in the open country that he loved so much.

While on Lanai he had done much experimenting in grasses to hold the soil and in tree planting for windbreaks and water conservation. Today an automobile drive over the

mountain top over the newly opened road that bears his name, one can see the results of his efforts. Tall Norfolk Island pine trees planted to catch the fog drip, the Eucalyptus, the New Zealand Cordyline, and the Manuka, in masses of pink and white when in full bloom, make a truly beautiful sight. The Norfolk Island pine trees are being used today in the Hawaiian Pineapple Company's scientific study of fog drip.

In 1935-37 in cooperation with the Bishop Museum, Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association, Board of Agriculture and Forestry, and Hui Manu, Mr. Munro made a personal bird survey of the main group, spending at least a month on each forested island. Thus he was able to connect the work done in 1890 with recent studies of the avi-fauna of the Hawaiian Islands.

In 1937-1941 in cooperation with the U.S. Biological Survey, now the Fish & Wildlife Service, he inaugurated leg banding of sea birds on the off-shore islands. This was later extended to eight outer islands and as far south as the equator. This project was interrupted by World War II.

In 1938 a trip was made to the Equatorial, Phoenix, Manus and Tokulau Groups landing on Howland, Canton, Enderbury, Pango Pango, Tau, Rose Atoll, Jarvis and Palmyra. The trip was made on the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Roger B. Taney under the command of Captain E. A. Coffin. Lt. Com. Richard B. Black who at that time was in charge of the Colonists on these islands, was making his routine inspection trip, and invited Mr. Munro to go with him to initiate some of his colonists as deputy bird banders. It was on this trip that Mr. Munro became better acquainted with the friendly little White Tern (Fairy Tern). A dozen of these lovely little birds circled over his head for one-half a mile. This bird carries nine small fish in its bill and feeds its young one by one without dropping a fish.

On this trip banding was done on five islands - 1275 birds were banded and 1349 bands were left with Deputy Bander J.E.A. Kinney who was then stationed on Howland Island.

In the early years of the Hawaii Audubon Society Mr. Munro wrote for the "Elepaio" the monthly publication of the Society and has contributed many articles throughout the years. His letters to the newspapers have always been a source of interest to his readers.

A demand for a handbook on the birds of Hawaii caused him to start writing such a volume from data collected over the years. In 1944 "Birds of Hawaii" was published. This very attractive book, well illustrated by color plates, describes the native Hawaiian sea and forest birds, stray visitants to the Hawaiian Islands, and the birds recently imported by the Hui Manu Society of Honolulu.

During 1939 and 1940 Mr. Munro made a vigorous campaign for the protection of the native and migratory shore birds.

In 1945 he revisited Midway Island by plane. This was in sharp contrast to the first trip which was made to the Island on the old forty ton schooner "Kaalokai" in 1890.

During World War II, Mr. Munro met Dr. Dean Amadon of the American Museum who was studying the Hawaiian birds while on military duty in Hawaii. Through his recommendation Mr. Munro was made an elected member of the American Ornithologists' Union, an honor limited at that time to 200 outstanding ornithologists of North America.

In connection with Dr. Kenneth P. Emory's work on Aviation Survival during the war, Mr. Munro mounted a number of the birds which were used in the aviation survival training courses. The birds were mounted on the wing to enable aviators to learn to recognize the birds in flight and thus know their location when down at sea. These birds included the Black-footed and Laysan Albatross both with a wing spread of six feet, the Frigate Bird with a wing spread of seven feet, and the Wedge-tailed Shearwater, Booby, Plover,

several species of Tern, and the Tropic bird.

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By nature my father is strong willed, stubborn, slow to anger, but fierce tempered. We respected his word when we were children. He has, however, an inner softness which expresses itself in gallantry and thoughtfulness - in carrying a precious flower home to mother - in kindness to animals. He has a keen interest, enthusiasm, and appreciation for everything around him. His great thrill is to find something new to Science. He has a keen sense of humor, likes good music and though remotely situated for many years of his life he always had a library of good books and music. Mother played the piano and sang. I have often seen father steal into the living room, sit, and listen. Many of his favorite Shakesperian quotations he recites today.

Mother died in 1931, and several years later he married Miss Jessie Gallagher of Auckland, New Zealand. She shares his interest in natural history, books and music, and by her care, enables him to lead, at 91, a full and active life. In late years he has turned his interest more to plants than birds although they are always dear to his heart. He spends many mornings taking notes on the habits of the Pacific Golden Plover when they return annually to Kapiolani Park; and continues to work on his new project, Na Lauu Hawaii.

After moving to Diamond Head several years ago he received permission from the National Guard to plant in this area. Always having been interested in the dry land forest, he has invisioned in future years for Diamond Head, the beautiful Hawaiian Wiliwili whose flowers range from deep red, and orange to the various shades of yellow - and an undergrowth of massed ilima, nehe, hibiscus brackenridgei, and other yellow flowers already established - to form a carpet of gold at her base. What could be more truly Hawaiian. In an area especially planned for experimentation - Na Lauu Hawaii is planted in dry land native plants. There is also a "kula" for many varieties of grasses which ripple in the wind on the slopes of one of the ravines. And, ever mindful of the birds, we find that he is fostering the jatropaha, wild oats, and the salt bush, that the birds may find food. What a pity that the Hawaiian Oo and those rare birds of the collection in that fascinating trunk cannot be seen today flying in this natural bird sanctuary.

May my father's dream that this majestic mountain be never marred by the encroachment of house lots on her slopes and instead, be dedicated to the native plants and birds of Hawaii-nei and established as one of the very lovely parks of our Islands. George Campbell Munro, ever patient, hopes that this will be so.

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#### FIELD NOTES:

The trip of April 28th was probably our last shore bird trip for the season and the start was made at Paiko drive where but one Tattler was sighted. We made a short trip into the Cole place to see the Blue Winged Teal among the many domesticated Mallards; there were numerous Mallard ducklings to be seen also.

At Kuliouou where we initiated the new "scope" the following count was made:

3 Frigate Birds	5 Sanderling
45 Pacific Golden Plover, almost all in breeding plumage	4 Tattler
21 Ruddy Turnstone	1 American Cardinal

At Kuapa Pond we saw 24 Shovelers, numerous Coot, several Pacific Golden Plover and 1 Brazilian Cardinal.

Our count at Rabbit Island was:

4 English Sparrows	A considerable number of Sooty Terns
4 Booby	A considerable number of Noddy Terns
1 Pacific Golden Plover	
1 White-Eye	
1 American Cardinal	

At Bellows Field we saw:

5 Pacific Golden Plover	2 House Finch
1 Turnstone	6 Mynah
2 Gallinule	3 Ricebirds
15 American Cardinals	1 Chinese Thrush
3 Brazilian Cardinals	8 White-eye
2 Chinese Doves	

Kaelepulu Pond was practically dry, however, we recorded the following:

200 (Est.) Pacific Golden Plover	24 Hawaiian Stilt
1 Tattler	60 Coot
1 Turnstone	2 Chinese Thrush
28 Shovelers, mostly males	
2 Sanderling	

It is to be noted that this, we think, is the first time Chinese Thrush have been reported from this locale. Plover seen on the trip were almost all in breeding plumage.

Ruth R. Rockafellow, Recorder

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Field Trip: Pa Lehua, May 12, 1957.

The trip to Pa Lehua was truly delightful inasmuch as the day was perfect and visibility good. Of the nine making the trip, only three were Audubon members.

Our final count was as follows:

Numerous Ricebirds	10 White-eye
Mynahs	53 Apapane
American Cardinals	23 Amakihi
Brazilian Cardinals	11 Elepaio
Barred Doves	3 Owls
Chinese Doves	2 Mocking Birds
Bush Warblers	2 Pheasant

We were most happy to come in with a record of Mocking Birds and Owls from this locale. One Owl was most accommodating, it flew within 100 feet of us and we were able to check the identifying marks with the naked eye. It was a real thrill.

Ruth R. Rockafellow, Recorder

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FROM THE MAIL BAG:

Excerpt from letter of May 6 from Helen Chambers: (New York City)

What a wonderful day! This trip was sponsored by the Museum of Natural

History. There were about 50 of us, apparently a record number. Usually they have only about 20 or 30 on their expeditions. We went out by subway to Jamaica Bay, a journey of over an hour. Beautiful day - sun shining, sea breeze blowing. Birds everywhere! I made myself a little list on a piece of my brown paper lunch bag, and here it is:

Laughing gulls	Semi-palmated plovers
Black-crowned night herons	Barn swallows
Flicker (dead)	Red winged blackbirds (flocks and flocks)
Yellow-legs	<b>Green heron</b>
Brant geese (hundreds if not thousands of them)	Cormorants
Immature snow goose	American egret
Piping plovers	Ruddy turnstone
	Scaup ducks

It was at noon, as we sat on the sand dunes and watched two night herons and the egret and plover as we ate our lunch, that one of the girls leaned over and picked an Indian arrow head off the ground, and you must admit that seldom happens to you on Oahu.

Well, I enjoyed it very much and will go out with the group again, but I confess it made me a little homesick for my favorite birders. My regards to my friends in the Audubon group.

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#### JUNE ACTIVITIES:

**FIELD TRIPS:**      June 9 - To Peahinaia. This is a new trail for our group. It is in the Opauala section of the Koolau Mountains, and is reported not difficult.

June 23 - To Kaunala trail. This is another new trail for us, also in the Koolau, near Pupukea. We anticipate two new and interesting experiences.

Mace Norton will lead both trips. For each walk the meeting place will be the Punchbowl side of the Library of Hawaii at 8:00 a.m.

**MEETING:**      June 17 - At the Aquarium Auditorium at 7:30 p.m. A Disney nature film will be shown.

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