

# THE ELEPAIO

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## SHAHMIE

Continued from the March issue.

By Alida Chanler

To our surprise the female seemed smaller than Shahmie; she looked rather like a warbler with a longer tail. Her coloring was brown above, a pinkish tan below which blended with her very pink legs and feet; hence her name, Pinkyfeet.

When we opened her cage door after Shahmie had flown out on the porch, she timidly came out to explore the radio room, where she chose a picture frame to roost upon. Later she learned to fly out on the porch where she hid above the cornice to escape Shahmie. She spent most of her time looking out at the big trees, showing a nostalgia for the wild that Shahmie had never shown; she must have known more freedom than he ever had. She sang "good-night" when roosting on her picture-frame as Shahmie flew into his closet. Her singing resembled his in form, but was higher pitched. It was not as vigorous nor as true a pitch as his. Her flight was rapid and deft, she easily out-distanced Shahmie and us too.

The long trek north with two cages in their respective cardboard boxes side by side on the floor of the back seat, was not easy. In and out of motels, the double load and the double number of mealworms to be carried and cared for ~~was~~ a problem. Sometimes there were no worms at all for them, only carrots and mockingbird food. The cold windy boat trip to our island in Maine was the last straw; Pinky definitely did not take to the north. We gave the birds a room to themselves, but in the morning they were so cold we caged them and placed them in the kitchen for warmth. I hunted centipedes, beetles, small earthworms and flies, all of which were gratefully accepted. We made a small screened area for them among the lilacs, where they could hop on real earth, and sit on real branches, and talk to real chickadees in the bushes. Once when it rained, Pinky stayed out there until she was soaking and too heavy with water to rise to the windowsill by which they entered their room. She was gasping when we helped her up and took her to dry off by the fire. There she turned her back to the flames and thawed out contentedly while Shahmie admired her. Both birds picked up the dee-dee whistle of the chickadee, using it as a signal to each other. This was the only American bird song Pinky ever used; she did not learn any from the records.

With every mile on the return trip Shahmie sang louder, rejoicing. When we released Pinky in her old quarters in the radio room she perked up and sang a little. Her appetite improved, she ate twice as much as usual, and grew larger. The two cages before the fire during breakfast that winter gave her real pleasure. She flirted with Shahmie through the bars instead of hissing as she used to do.

Both birds enjoyed the thousands of robins calling and flying about. Brown thrashers were singing in the swamp to the south of us, catbirds in the Brazilian pepper west of the lawn. Cardinals at the feeding station were chasing each other



and nesting. Pinky nestled up to Shahmie and they billed and cooed together. On the closet floor I spread all manner of nesting material, dead leaves, grass, pine needles, Australian pine needles. Shahmie stuck his head into every hole he saw, including the radio transmitter's dark recesses, and I realized that they needed a bird house. Bill set one up inside the wire mesh transom above the porch screen door. Shahmie poked his head into it, showing Pinky what he had discovered, and she came up to see. After a while she began flying back and forth between the closet full of nesting material and the transom, rising gracefully to the bird house with something in her beak. She was carrying only the resinless needles of the Casuariana, a native of Southeast Asia as she is. Shahmie took no part in nest building, except to spur on Pinky's efforts with song. He sang more beautifully than ever now. Syncopation was evident in much of his singing.

Pinky laid her egg a day, sage green spotted with brown, and we could hear her turning the eggs on the rather flimsy platform of needles. It was very hot under the porch roof. After more than two weeks of it, she left the birdhouse to look at me appealingly, then retired to the radio room, roosting on her picture frame that night. The eggs were infertile. We cleaned out the house and replaced it on the lower window sill of the screened porch. In good time Pinky built a second nest, using more needles than the first time, and again she laid her batch of eggs. This time Shahmie took up a position in front of the birdhouse to guard it when she flew off to feed. When hatching time came, however, on May 12, 1952, something happened for which Pinky was not prepared. Suddenly Shahmie flew wildly around and around the screened porch, without alighting. He held something in his beak; it was the first nestling he had ever seen and he had somehow lost his head. Later we learned that zoo animals do this. They will accept captivity for themselves, but not for their young, which instinctively they seek to free. To save the rest of the brood we locked him in the radio room, but Pinky threw herself against the windows separating them. After a second nestling had been injured and restored to her, Pinky talked to it softly, but when she saw it was dying she looked at me with huge eyes and deserted the nest.

If captivity was the cause of this tragedy, then captivity must cease; we would free Shahmie and Pinky. Friends pointed out to us that cage birds cannot fly fast, they become prey to hawks and other enemies, are persecuted by the wild birds of the territory and cannot find their way back to feed. Actually Pinky had always been a fast flier, and Shahmie had been singing the songs of the other birds on that porch long enough for them to accept him. Another trip north with two cages was out of the question. We planned to arrange for their needs when we should go north and to let them fly free.

Bill turned down a corner of the wire mesh covering the transom above the screened porch door. To attract the birds' attention to their new exit, he placed a jar of mealworms on the transom in front of the opening. Up went Shahmie, took his fill of worms, and flew down satisfied. The hole meant nothing to him. Pinky flew up for worms, had a few, and looked outside. She then flew out and into hibiscus bushes below the porch. Female cardinals sat there, having sunflower seeds at the feeding station nearby. Pinky hopped among the hibiscus and the cardinals hopped with her. Shahmie was beside himself with excitement, watching from his perch in the radio room. He sang and sang encouragement without once trying to follow Pinky, I doubt if he realized how she got out, but he saw she was free among the cardinals. Pinky fluttered along the shrubbery, around the porch and towards the big banyan behind the house. Still Shahmie sang his loudest. We sat listening. We spoke to Shahmie when he stopped singing after a while. "Shahmie, call Pinky." Silence. We could no longer hear anything, all of us nonplussed. I walked toward the jungle behind the garage, where I found the cardinals looking at me in silence. Nobody moved. I thought of the garage and opened the doors. There in the rafters was Pinky, flying back and forth, unable to find her way out. The windows were slightly open, and she must have mistaken these windows in stucco walls for those of the radio room. To fly out she would have to fly down, but her instinct led her to fly to the ceiling, where she now circled. I



reported to Bill what I had seen, and he carried her cage into the garage. Placing the cage and a jar of mealworms in the open door, he said "Here are worms for you, Pinky, worms in your little house," a phrase he had used a thousand times when feeding her. She dropped down to the cage, entered, and he closed it and carried her back to the radio room. She went to roost on her picture frame, and that was the end of the first adventure.

Next day after both birds had been fed a second breakfast, we re-opened the gap in the transom wire and soon Pinky saw the hole and flew out. This time she went straight to the deeper end of the fish pond which is visible from the porch. Bill, using field glasses, observed a mockingbird land near Pinky on the cement border of the pond and then hop to the shallow end and take a bath. Pinky followed and she too took a bath. This time Shahmie didn't miss a trick; he flew out through the transom, landing on the deeper end of the pond. Again the mockingbird hopped along toward the shallow end and took a second bath. Now we knew our birds had two friends: cardinals and mockingbirds both helped them find their way about. We drove to town, confident that things would be going well for Shahmie and Pinky.

They did not return to us that evening, but roosted out together. At dawn next morning I heard Shahmie singing on the wing as he flew past my window from the big banyan to the fish pond. He sang a lovely song he never sang as a caged bird, except once in his sleep when he must have been dreaming. All these years he had kept the memory of India in his heart, and when flight with Pinky at dawn brought back the memory, he sang it easily. Around noon both our birds came in through the transom to ask for mealworms. They went right into their open cages, as if nothing unusual had occurred. They had flown in and out of their cages so often the pattern was established, and they did not hesitate to come when hungry. A new pattern brings a pause, a moment of reflection and conscious appraisal before instinct and habit form a new path. Thus both birds pause on the transom before going out, far more than in coming back, as though gauging possible danger in the big open spaces. Shahmie sometimes froze on the transom in memory of past fears. This, together with the friendly guidance of the wild birds reassured us, and we made plans to go north without Shahmie or Pinky. Pinky was alert to insects on the ground, for after a shower she hunted eagerly, and Shahmie learned this also. They did not go into sunny lawns, but looked under dead leaves. They gave a little hop, fanning out the white tail-feathers, as they poked around. But they supplemented this insect fare with mealworms on the porch. We enlisted the aid of friends who were spending the summer a mile away to keep a pan of mealworms replenished. So we closed the house and drove to Maine without them.

When we returned five months later Shahmie was waiting for us. As Bill parked the car and took out the suit-cases, I walked under the arbor beside the driveway and there was Shahmie, singing a song he had invented for the car years before. As I stood directly beneath him looking up he fluffed his feathers and flew off. Realizing he felt strange after our long absence, I helped unpack the car, and soon he flew in through the transom for mealworms and was his old self. We did not see Pinky. Bill walked about the place calling her by name, and there to the north in a large sugar cane palm was Pinky. She came in for worms later on. However, for days Shahmie would call her, singing all over the garden, and Pinky would not show up. She explored farther afield and did not come home for several days at a time.

As winter brought cool nights however, she came in with Shahmie and at breakfast we closed them in their respective cages by the fireplace. As I brought fresh water and egg to her cage, Pinky hopped restlessly about. A taste of freedom made her shy, but did not change him at all. He enjoyed his bird records, and showed restlessness only after the sun had warmed the place. Then we opened their cages and let them fly outside. In this manner they established their own routine, flying in after sunset to roost, and out again before noon.

As we moved about the place during the day, Shahmie greeted us with song when we approached his perch in the woods. Otherwise he did not sing much in winter. In



late February the brilliance of Shahmie's singing returned, and he took up one of his fast songs of India: "Strike, double it, treble it, bubble it down, too true!" The rhythm was infectious, as he repeated it all over the garden. A migrating blue bird sang overhead, a red-winged blackbird called, orange blossoms scented the air. It was full moon. Pinky flew in an hour ahead of dusk, resting in her cage after eating an early supper. When Shahmie came in, she watched him eat, then flew out again into the moonlight. Shahmie watched her go, then retired as usual. Next morning all sorts of native bird songs could be heard, wrens, towhees, cardinals, warblers of several species. Inchworms fell from the live oak flowers, fireflies appeared before the moon rose. That night, March 12, 1953, Pinky failed to show up for supper, and Shahmie joined her in the banyan after his supper. For the next few days neither bird came in at all. I could hear them singing together in the jungle south of us, then they moved west. Evidently the bonanza of inch-worms made mealworms quite superfluous. Shahmie and Pinky were seeking a home-site, exploring possible dangers of each section by night as well as by day, and exposure to wind and sun at nesting sites. In the middle of March they spent five days and nights in the south jungle among the huge live-oaks near the bay, five days and nights west of us among live-oaks beside the orange and guava trees and century plants, and five days and nights (maybe four) in the jungle to the north: a mixed growth of oak, cedar, palm, fig-rubber, etc. Clearly the problem of safe homesites is the occupation of shamas during the spring equinox. We favored the area west of us, as it belonged to our own property, and was easily accessible. So Bill took an old bird house and placed it on top of a water-pipe stuck deep into the sandy ground in the shade of a live-oak. By April 3d we were rewarded with the sight of wisps of Australian pine needles protruding through the entrance. Pinky was now roosting indoors, perhaps indulging in a bit of last minute home security before starting the more adventurous life in the bird house. On Easter morning, April 5th, she began setting on her eggs. It was also early April last year when she laid her first batch of eggs which proved to be infertile. On April 20th Pinky deserted her nest, and she and Shahmie spent the day together in the swamp trees. When Bill examined the nest it was empty. Was it an owl, a snake or possibly Shahmie? Bill hung a new parakeet house under the eaves of the garage, against a wall of rough cement which neither snake nor squirrel could climb. It faced toward the north jungle. By April 22d Pinky was there, building a second nest. Heavy rains brought insects out of the ground under the big banyan, and Pinky found enough not to bother coming in for mealworms. Mosquitoes appeared a few days later. In spite of the warm weather both our birds were roosting indoors. Shahmie sang bobolink by the hours, and No. 10, the lullaby nesting song, as Pinky's tail showed in the entrance of the new nest.

In May gulls and mergansers had gone north, egrets moved majestically along the ditch hunting snails. Wood ibis and man-o-war birds circled above in gleaming beauty. Fish crows and blue jays routed out the owls from the west area where Pinky's earlier nesting house stands deserted. That house had a much larger entrance than the parakeet breeding house we now use. Perhaps it was this large hole which allowed enemies to enter and get at the eggs. We caged Shahmie and placed the cage on a windowsill of the garage when the new eggs were due to hatch, just to be on the safe side. Shahmie sang beautifully to his family above him, and only at roosting time did he show any wish to get out and seek another perch. He sang songs No. 1, 10, 3 and many flowing songs of no particular form. Bill set up a tape recorder outside the garage at dawn to catch the flow of song. It was fun getting a recording of the shama theme song "Strike and double it," of "Here I sing now," bobolink, canary and many other songs.

While Pinky was hunting insects among the azalea leaf mold, Bill looked into the nest and found two baby birds. It was very warm and dry, and Pinky had trouble finding any insects. I carried the mealworm pan outside to draw her to where leafhoppers and small grasshoppers crawl about the lawn, but she would only take worms from the pan when it was in the shade. Being jungle birds, shamas do not feed in the sunlight. Pinky took about fifty mealworms per day per baby.

On May 23d she sang urgently to us as we approached the garage, and Shahmie showed excitement. Bill put the ladder up to the bird house and found the nest empty. In the



jungle north of us there was new note, a beep or bell-like call, about twenty feet above the ground. I traced two of these bell-notes; their pitch was a half-tone different, so one could distinguish between the two baby birds. I did not see them. Once a bell-note came closer to me after I had whistled to Shahmie; I realized that the babies oriented themselves by Shahmie's whistling, so I remained silent. Shahmie sang the bobolink song over and over for an hour. After the bell-notes moved farther into the jungle, he became silent and lonely, so I placed his cage on the edge of the jungle, and he sang a love song, No. 8, and was answered by both babies. On June 3d we released Shahmie so he could escort Pinky on her flights for mealworms. After a few days he began to carry one worm at a time to the babies. On the 9th I saw a baby shama for the first time, observing it through field glasses as it sat in the banyan. Next day Pinky brought the baby to the transom where it sat while she dove down to the mealworm pan. Its throat was whitish, its breast pale golden buff, its back mottled brown. It already had the white feathers under the dark tail. On the twelfth the water in the bay registered 98° F. Nights cannot cool off when the surrounding water is hot, so we went north. We arranged for someone to keep the mealworm pan supplied through the summer, about a thousand worms to be dumped there once a week. Reports by mail indicated that the worms were being eaten, and the family was all right through August.

Pinky was last reported seen in September 1953. After her moult, she must have flown south with the young birds, for only Shahmie was there to greet us upon our return. He flew right into the porch and took a worm from our hands, but roosted out. Next day he flew into the living room, nostalgic for his old haunts, and we played his bird records to him for hours. He whistled the baby bell-note, then seemed to listen, then sang one of Pinky's songs. When robins came he cheered up and after they flew north in February 1954, he sang to myrtle warblers. In March his full voice returned, he fed on inch-worms and sang in the swamp for hours.

To be concluded

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#### MOLOKAI NOTES

By Charles Hanson

It was with much interest that Mrs. Hanson and I arrived on Molokai on December 30 for a brief 2-day stay. I had looked forward for some time to looking over the bird situation there.

On Tuesday, December 31, we were taken on a trip to the eastern end of the island by some friends, actually going right down into Halawa Valley. Our birding for that day was not exceptional but was interesting. We saw Mocking Birds, which were plentiful, Chuckar Partridge, Night Heron, Shoveller Ducks, Wandering Tattlers, a good supply of House Finches, Ricebirds, White-eyes, Pintail Ducks, Golden Plover, Gallinule, English Sparrows, Mynahs, Cardinals, Leiothrix, and California Quail.

Besides the birds we saw some very beautiful scenery.

On New Years Day we took the forest trail at daybreak and arrived at the top of Wailau Canyon at sunrise. We started down the trail and were immediately surrounded by Apapane. We did not get to the bottom of the trail but in the three hours that we hiked we saw some beautiful scenery and wildlife. We came within a few feet of wild goats on 3 occasions and were thrilled with the sight.

Birds seen here were the White-tailed Tropic Bird, Apapane, White-eyes, and Leiothrix.

On the way home we saw the Ring-necked Pheasant, many Skylarks, Lace-neck Doves, Barred Doves, and repeats of the previous day. All in all I would say that the trip



was very profitable.

On our check lists I would recommend these changes. Apapane I would put in bold face caps, House Finch I would put in bold face caps, Mocking Bird I would put in light face caps.

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#### ALBATROSS COMES TO TOWN

On January 31, 1958, I received a phone call from a young fellow named James Baker (sorry I forgot to ask his age), who stated that on the day before he had found a "gooney bird" tired and bedraggled on a street in Kailua, Oahu. He took the bird home, cared for it overnight and released it the next morning. When first freed at the beach it tried to swim off shore, but on each of three tries the waves washed it back. Finally the boy caught the bird, tossed it into the air, and it then flew off over the sea. From the boy's complete and accurate description the bird was a Laysan Albatross. It was not wearing a band. I commended the youth on his thoughtfulness in rescuing the bird and in seeing that it was returned to freedom. It is certainly an unusual happening for an albatross to alight in a village street. Perhaps the bird was injured in some way, or it may have been the weather that day which was wet and stormy.

Joseph E. King

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#### NEWS OF OUR MEMBERS:

During the week of March 2d two of our most valued members set off on extended trips. Margaret Newman started around the world, going first to the Orient. She expects to be away for about a year. Al Labrecque will first take a good look at the southern states, and then will tour Europe and England by car. He expects to be home in about six months. Our best wishes for fine trips and good birding go with them both.

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Mrs. Ernest C. Ebert writes: "I look across Santa Cruz Bay directly to Hawaii. A little grebe feeds in front every morning, and a black Phoebe sits on the post above the beach."

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Grace Gossard Gregg writes from Tucson: "Birding has begun to pick up with the approach of spring, which sounds a little odd in view of the ice that is often on my bird bath in the early morning. But there is activity beginning with the birds singing and fighting as though establishing territories. I bird ... out in the desert, and on a typical morning there are many phainopeplas, a couple of cardinals, pyrrhuloxia and mockingbirds, and varying numbers of verdins, ruby-crowned kinglets, flickers (both red and gilded shafted), Gila woodpeckers, house wrens, cactus wrens and Gambel's sparrows ... I was delighted when I discovered both the mountain bluebird and the lazuli bunting, flitting around the creosote bushes. I am quite amused at the extreme interest I have developed in 'My List', so enjoyed the section in Peterson's new book The Bird Watcher's Anthology called the lure of the list. As of January 22 I have seen 85 different species for 1958."

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MIDWAY PROBLEMS: John W. Aldrich, in charge of the Section of Bird Distribution, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Department of the Interior, has an article in the January-February Audubon Magazine entitled "Conflict of Birds and Aircraft at Midway." He outlines the situation which is all too well known to us, but his account is more hopeful than some others. He expressed the hope that leveling the sand dunes may be sufficient to eliminate the danger from the Laysan Albatross.



CONSERVATION PROBLEMS in a wide variety of areas, ranging through ornithology, fisheries, national parks, land, water and so on, are interestingly discussed in volumes published annually by the Yale Conservation Program. These volumes are made up of essays written by conservation students and friends of the Program in other departments of the University. The topics discussed are present day problems, most of which we face here in Hawaii. We have received from the Program volumes 2 to 4, which will be placed in our library at the Aquarium, available to members. Additional copies may be purchased from the Program, 77 Prospect St., New Haven, Conn. for \$1.00 a copy.

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BIRD NOTE FROM WAIKIKI  
By Ruth R. Rockafellow

On Tuesday evening (March 4) while preparing dinner my attention was called to an unusual amount of mynah disturbance in the parking lot adjacent to my cottage. Looking out I saw three mynahs -- two on top, the third one was the under-dog and was being pecked at unmercifully by the other two. They were all three making a great many of different noises which undoubtedly caught my ear and caused me to look. The victim was pinned down by two pair of feet and the cries coming from him were real distress cries, very loud and alarming; the latter is just what the cry proved to be. Soon an American Cardinal male followed by his mate came and perched on the base of the coconut tree near which the fracas was taking place. They fluttered, called and fussed seemingly to distract the villains. Also came English Sparrows in pairs and otherwise -- nine in all, and finally three Linnets joined the ensemble of fight-breakers, if that is what they could be called. They added their particular kind of protests. Their combined din and fussing so annoyed the villains that their watchfulness lapsed for a moment; the victim aware of the opportunity, fled -- tailed by annoyed Mynahs; they all disappeared over the roof top.

The female Cardinal then flew to my wash line and was joined by a male Sparrow. They chatted back and forth for about 7 minutes, no doubt pleased with their part in the rescue, however, when another male Sparrow joined them, they all departed.

I was then aware that what I had heard was the distress call of a Mynah which was answered as promptly by birds of several species as any human situation of a similar nature might provoke.

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FIELD NOTES:

Field trip, February 23, 1958, Pupukea-Kahuku area.

The trail in the Pupukea area lured twenty-seven Audubon members and friends on a hike and bird watch trip this Sunday. The easy trail wound in and out among shady tropical trees and open sunny places. However, the sun was not much in evidence, but most members came prepared with rain coats, which they used to good advantage. Lantana, ground orchids, vervane and many other wild flowers dotted the path. Thimble berries were in abundance, too, which the hikers enjoyed along the way.

Shelter was found at which the hikers lunched and later they drove down to Kahuku Point, where there was an opportunity to enjoy many different birds. Plover, turnstone and sanderling were numerous in the fields. Four tiny birds feeding among the others caused much discussion and eye strain, and were tentatively identified as semi-palmated sandpipers.

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Field trip, March 9, Pa Lehua Trail.

Whatever guardian angel watches over Auduboners was right on the job on March 9. Fifteen congenial people went to Pa Lehua and were rewarded with magnificent weather and scenery and 18 species of birds. On the way up the long winding road one car became stuck in the mud, but the combined efforts of the men soon took care of that. The trail was a bit slippery in spots but on the whole was in fine condition in spite



of the heavy rain during the week.

Soon after we turned off the highway on to the mountain road we spotted North American cardinals, both barred and Chinese doves and two mockingbirds. On the trail we saw amakihi (two of which were kind enough to sing on the wing) apapane, elepaio, white-eyes, leiothrix, and more North American cardinals. Two owls and four tropic birds were seen circling in the valleys below. We heard, but did not see, a number of bush warblers. Three of us sat quietly for nearly an hour trying to catch a glimpse of these elusive creatures, but no luck. The lehua, koa, black wattle and silk oak were all in bloom, affording many of the birds their favorite feeding spots. On the return trip down the mountain road there were more doves, both North American and Brazilian cardinals, plover, pheasants, ricebirds, more mockingbirds (a total of seven), and as a last treat, a skylark.

Euphie Shields

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AUDUBON VISITOR: Mrs. Rea King, Director of TV-Radio at the National Audubon Society in New York City, will be in Honolulu, arriving on April 28th. She will come (with her husband) for a convention: American Women in Radio and Television, but hopes to find a little time to see Hawaiian birds.

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#### APRIL ACTIVITIES:

FIELD TRIPS: Al Stoops will lead the April trips. Starting point for each: Punchbowl side of Library of Hawaii, at 7:00 a.m.

NOTE: S T A R T I N G T I M E -- 7:00 a.m.

April 13 - To the booby colony at Ulupau Head. In order not to disturb the nesting birds, more than is avoidable, this trip will be open only to members and their invited guests.

April 27 - To Waianu trail. This is reputed to be a beautiful trail in the Waiahole valley, which few of us have seen.

MEETING: April 21 - "New Bird Exhibit at the Bishop Museum" - Mr. Ka'upena Wong will act as our guide. Members who have cars and can do so, meet at the Aquarium at 7:30 p.m. to provide transportation to the Museum. The meeting will begin at 8:00 p.m.

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