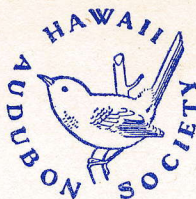


# THE ELEPAIO

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## OBSERVATIONS ON BIRD LIFE OF MIDWAY By Charles Schell

(We have kindly been given permission to print the following, taken from a letter written by Mr. Schell to Miss Margaret Titcomb.)

... Tropic birds are here in legion now, all day long performing their raucous flying-backward dance. Up until now I suffered under the delusion that only humming birds were capable of flying backwards, and in a sense I was right, for the tropic bird version is more of a hovering, such as many birds exhibit when coming in to roost. And yet it is more, too, for they actually move backwards, many feet, with their red tails either bent down and under or pushed askew to one side or the other. As many as half a dozen will join in this acrobatic, and the harsh shrieks even disturb the placid gooneys. They hang thus suspended for a few seconds and then dash away to re-perform the ballet elsewhere. They are strong flyers, and quick, and yet they exhibit the heaviness peculiar to pigeons. At sea I have often remarked the distinct difference in the flight of these birds and that of most other sea-birds. Whereas most oceanic birds appear to master lightly their medium, tropic birds give the impression of constant effort to keep aloft. The white-tailed species, which we apparently do not have here, flap and soar far more easily than the red-tailed. In fact the sight of a white-tailed tropic bird high up, outlined against the sky, is to me one of the most exquisite sights in nature, particularly so when back-lighted by the sun, but that is another story, and so back to where we were.

Today I managed to get away from the noisy, dusty, terrible rock-crusher and horrendous concrete batching plant and the 16,000,000 "all this time and nothing to do" other employees of H.D. to prowl, I mean scramble through thickets of scaevola bushes out in the deserted part of the island. This is the first time I've really gone into the out-back and I was well repaid -- after, that is, relearning the lesson of abandoning preconceived notions. Somewhere I had read or heard that tropic birds nest "in" the scaevola bushes, and of course, I interpreted that as meaning "up in" and so searched the branches for the patch of white which would so easily betray the nest. Of course, everywhere was the white of gooney birds, but "on" the ground, not "in". Then all of a sudden I saw a different, smaller patch of white and in three steps I stood not one foot from a tropic-bird on its nest. And truly this bird was in the scaevola bushes, about as far in as it could get, only down, not up, right smack on the ground with scarcely room to turn.

This was the first time I have been able to examine this species close at hand and alive. And what a beautiful sight -- the delicate pinkish sheen of the plumage, the vermillion, sharp, curved compressed bill and the black eye watching with the sure

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1. The term "gooney" refers to the albatross, and is given colloquially to either the black-footed or Laysan albatross.



keen awareness only seen in wild animals. The creature did not budge, and beyond the unmistakable aura of aliveness, the only visible evidence of life was the camera-clicking eyelid. The background was grubby gray and brown and in it this bird was set like a jewel. There was a swiftness and dash in every line from the clean sharp point of its bill to the two long red tail feathers divided scissors-like, one on one side, the other on the other side of a dead upright stick. Less than a foot away was a baby gooney which was raising an uproar of indignation at the intruder, but the tropic bird stuck to its nest as if glued, and I thought, as I compared these two birds, the Italian and the Scot. And I thought further -- why? Here were two birds bred and raised in identical surroundings, and yet so completely different. One the emotional, the indecisive, the clown and artist, the other the stoic, the spartan, the warrior, the swift and incisive. What is the purpose or is there no purpose beyond the demand to breed and so diverge as rapidly as possible?

I put out my finger to the baby gooney and he snapped and backed away until I managed to reach the back of his neck. Then, as I scratched, he relaxed and sank to the ground in delicious surrender. I held a twig out to the tropic bird and he ignored it until it touched his bill, whereupon he snapped it away and flung it aside, all in one deft motion. In a flash the bird was again just as he had been, motionless. Meeting a new bird form can thus be more interesting in its way than meeting a new human, for in the former we engage in a family, generic or specific newness while in the latter there is the mere difference of race. What if animals could talk understandably?

In further prowling I came across several other tropic birds but the first was the best.

Later, when I was sitting by the airstrip watching gooneys line up and take off, two tropic birds came shrieking from somewhere to drop at the edge of a large bush. With no let up in noise they scrambled lizard-like over, under and around the woven branches to a well concealed spot deep inside. I was astonished to see what small openings these sizable birds struggled through. So unlike the gooney who takes his time to go to his nest, these birds fairly rocketed to the selected site. And even then they continued to scream and to jab at each other. It was only when I moved closer and into view, that the hullabaloo ceased. Then, like the earlier bird on the nest, they froze in position and watched me.

So much for tropic birds for the present, other than to say that I have yet seen no eggs, but as I have said there is little time to search. Probably it's too early anyway.

The young of the white tern, *Gygis alba*, are well grown now. They sit motionless on their branch with a concentrated air of not seeing you, but actually closely watching every movement. When you approach them the adults join in packs to dive-bomb you, sometimes six or more swooping close and hovering. What a sight -- the absolutely white feathering framed by jet black feet, bill, eye and primary shafts. Took some pictures but have my doubts for both the birds and myself were far too excited. They're perfectly lovely creatures but I'm not so sure of their dispositions.

And now, pausing to mention seeing several Man-o-war birds soaring over the island one afternoon, let me briefly get back to my loves, the gooneys.

This same walk into comparatively virgin land showed me the gooney as he was before we came to his island. By the roadsides and near human activity the gooneys sometimes show fear -- and no wonder -- but here they stood their ground and moved only in politeness. They accepted me as they would accept a tree or another gooney. In fact, I was the one who suffered from twinges of fear for space was restricted and I knew gooneys could and would take a good sized slice out of a threatening human leg.



The young were not so gracious as the adults for which I was grateful, because in such crowded quarters and on such treacherous ground, burrowed by petrels, there was a real danger of stepping on a young one. But, believe me, they'll not allow you to do that. They snap you right out of the way. I was reminded of the horn-blowing traffic in Mexico City which for safety I'd rank far ahead of downtown Honolulu or out of town Los Angeles.

The trick, of course, with gooneys is to sit quietly among them. Before long they completely forget you and go on about their comical gentle existence. One gooney was bobbing up to another when his bill struck under a low branch. Panic seized him and he very nearly broke his neck and my laughing sides before he came clear and moved on. Two others, shortly joined by a third, were dancing, rather trying to dance, for a threesome or foursome or any other some but two does not work out to any bird's satisfaction. They moved close to a baby gooney, the young, as I later learned, of one of the dancers, and this baby let loose with snaps and disgusted head flips. He acted like an irritated grandfather, little knowing or perhaps just at the moment caring not to know that one day he himself would be just as ridiculous, just as much of a nuisance. All about were gooneys in every state of dress and undress. I could have sat there for a week.

The baby gooneys are growing fast. Some build up their nests in the same haphazard way their parents do by picking up a bill load of sand or twigs and tossing it sideways. Others roam from their nests to find shade or to pick fights. It appears there is a pecking order here, too, although very restricted. Others nibble each other behind the ears. Still others rise and stretch their silly fuzzy wings or raise their beaks into the air to give their own interpretation of the adults' moo.

When they walk their feet are hidden and they half waddle, half glide -- a cross between a mechanical toy and a snail. But I'm told the best is yet to come and am truly looking forward to it ...

March 19, 1957

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NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF KUSAIE  
By Margaret Hill

(Miss Margaret Hill, of the Ponape District Education Department, Eastern Caroline Islands, is keenly interested in the natural history of the islands on which she teaches, in the Trust Territory. She has given helpful cooperation to the Curator of Collections at Bishop Museum, both notes and specimens.

A short time ago Miss Hill moved from Ponape to Kusaie. When she asked what kinds of birds she was likely to see in this area, we sent her a list, based on "The Avifauna of Micronesia," by Rollin H. Baker. She has just sent us the following list of species she had seen or heard of during the period from July 1956 to March 1957. -- E. H. Bryan, Jr.)

SEA BIRDS:

LO, Shearwater, probably the Dusky Shearwater, Puffinus lherminieri dichrous Finsch and Hartlaub.

SIK, White-tailed tropic bird, Phaethon lepturus dorotheae Mathews.

LUWNGWECYEC, Booby, apparently the Blue-faced booby, Sula dactylatra personata Gould. Not common.

Pacific man-o'-war, Fregata minor minor (Gmelin). Occasionally seen flying over head or chasing the Noddy tern; was not able to get the native name for it.



NOKLECP, Reef heron, Demigretta sacra sacra (Gmelin). Both the white and gray phase very common; the mottled phase is seen, but not so often.  
 MOWK (also called PAELWENG), Noddy, Anous stolidus pileatus (Scopoli).  
 SRAEKUWL (also called PAELWENG), White-capped noddy, Anous tenuirostris marculsi (Bryan).  
 KIAEKAE, White tern, Gygis alba candida (Gmelin).

#### MIGRATORY BIRDS:

KULUL, Pacific golden plover, Pluvialis dominica fulva (Gmelin).  
 KATKAT, Turnstone, Arenaria interpres interpres (Linnaeus).  
 KATKAT, Bristle-thighed curlew, Numenius tahitiensis (Gmelin). This bird is commonly seen here, but apparently the Kusaieans have lost its true name, because it is obvious that "Katkat" is the right name for the turnstone as witness the following: Mokilese, KOADKOAD; Ponapean, Ngatik, and Marshallese, KEDEKED (have used Ponapean spelling for the Marshallese sounds). I cannot remember the Pingelapese, but am certain the word is similar.  
 SE WAEWAE, apparently the Northern Phalarope, Phalaropus lobatus (Linnaeus). This is the Ngatik KIRIR and the one which I questioned being the Northern Phalarope, but an informant here seems to be certain of it, both from the picture (plate 12) in Blackman, "Birds of the Central Pacific Ocean," and his description of the bird's habits.

#### LARGE FOREST BIRDS:

FOWNE, Crimson-crowned fruit dove, Ptilinopus porphyraceus hemsheimi (Finsch).  
 ULWE, Micronesian pigeon, Dracula oceanica (Lesson and Garnot).  
 SUUKPWEROWSR, Long-tailed New Zealand cuckoo, Eudynamis taitensis (Sparrman). (Mayr doesn't list this bird from Kusaie, so I am putting the same scientific name as the one in Ponape.)  
 KALKECF, Caroline swiftlet, Collocalia inquieta (Kittlitz).

#### PERCHING BIRDS:

WEC, Micronesian Starling, Aplonis opacus (Kittlitz).  
 KAKO-WEC, Kusaie mountain starling, Aplonis corvinus (Kittlitz). Was thought to be extinct (see "Birds of the Southwest Pacific," by Ernst Mayr, page 298). My informant, a Kusaiean of over sixty, is familiar with it and says he last saw one in Finkol Mountains, above Utwec village, some time during 1955 or 1956. His son and one of the school teachers of Utwec both know the bird and have seen it in the Finkol Mountains. It is rare, but from their descriptions there is no question about it being this bird.  
 SRUUSR, Cardinal honey-eater, Myzomela cardinalis rubrata (Lesson).  
 TUWRAM, Micronesian dusty white-eye, Zosterops cinerea (Kittlitz).  
 SRUUSR PECLANG ("foreign sruusr"), Blue-faced Parrot finch, Erythrura trichroa (Kittlitz).  
 No information on the Kusaie rail, Aphanolimnas monasa (Kittlitz). King John, the 80 year old ex-king, says that about 50 years ago a German scientist found a bird called the TUWMUNUWT in a cave in the mountains, but he has heard of none of them being found since. Probably that was the rail.

[In an accompanying letter Miss Hill says, "I don't suppose that you will attempt to pronounce any of these native names. The teachers and I have been working on the new spelling during the time I have been here. Kusaiean is not as bad as it looks! The symbols (set up by Alfred Smith) for the short vowels in particular are confusing until you get used to them: AE is our short a, EC is short e, UW is short u, UU is the German u, OW is the aw in our saw, E is long a, and A is ah. The SR belongs strictly to Kusaie, and I put myself to sleep each night for weeks practicing it. I still admit defeat in trying to say the w after the consonant (excepting p which is like that in Ponapean)."]



NOTES ON BIRDS SEEN ON A THREE-DAY TRIP TO LANAI  
WITH THE HAWAIIAN TRAIL & MOUNTAIN CLUB  
BEGINNING February 22, 1957.

Traveling by jeep from Lanai City to Shipwreck Beach, on the northeastern coast of the island, four skylarks flew above us, singing merrily.

Hiking for about a mile along Shipwreck Beach, then by jeep, mostly close to shore, for some ten miles, to Halepalaoa Landing, some ten plover and two flocks of turnstone, one of six birds and the other of four, were seen. Each flock was accompanied by one plover.

A few more plover were seen around our campsite on Hulopoe Bay, on the south shore of the island.

While driving through grasslands and pineapple fields half a dozen owls and a dozen pheasants were noted.

A few Kentucky cardinals were heard and a dozen or so barred doves were seen, plus two or three lacenecks.

Mynahs were rather scarce.

Mace Norton saw a solitary apapane on the Munro Trail.

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NOTES ON THE FLORA: As Lanai is a "dry" island, its vegetation includes some spiny plants, such as kiawe, klu, and panini. In some places sandburs and cockleburs are thrown in for good measure. The kiawe along the northeastern shore is windblown into "lean-tos" with heavily leafed "roofs" sloping down to the windy beach and with large room-like openings on the leeward side.

At the old abandoned village of Keomuku, not far from Halepalaoa Landing, there are two groves of bearing coco palms, each of them an acre or two in area. In the churchyard is a tamarind tree. There are a few small wiliwili along the jeep trail; also a few tobacco and tomato plants.

Most of the lower slopes of the island, strewn with loose pieces of lava of various shapes and sizes, are covered with a lush growth of grass, well dotted with three- to six-foot ilima shrubs in full bloom.

The three- or four-mile hike along the Munro Trail, at some 3,000 feet elevation, was made more interesting by Mr. Munro's article in a recent issue of the ELEPAIO telling about his work of reforestation in this area. His plantings of Norfolk Island pine are thriving. There was plenty of moisture along the summit. A ridge in the vicinity of Maunalei Gulch, along which we hiked a short distance, was ankle-deep in water and mud. A climbing rose, by the side of the jeep trail, had beautiful, large, white, single blossoms. The vegetation indicated rich soil and ample moisture. Naupaka blossoms were more than twice the size of those on Oahu. This could, of course, be a variation of species.

Dr. Harold St. John had asked Broder Lucas to look for a rare white native hibiscus. Mace and I joined in the search but we failed to find it.

Al Labrecque



## FIELD NOTES:

Field Trip, Drum Road, June 23, 1957

The Kaunala Trail, which is reached by the way of the Drum Road, was the trip scheduled for this date. However, before reaching the trail, we decided to continue along the road instead of attempting the trail which would have been very wet and muddy from the heavy rain before.

Several of our group were Mainland visitors, who were much more interested in the flora seen along the road than in the fauna and were very much impressed with what our leader, Mr. Al Labrecque, had to tell them about our trees and plants.

We "bird watchers" lagged behind hoping to catch sight of the bush warbler, which we heard at every stop. We were lucky enough to see two. Other birds seen were few elepaio, American cardinal, leiothrix, and white-eye.

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Punchbowl Cemetery, June 23, 1957

Two mocking birds were seen along the upper mauka road. From their behavior we felt that they might be nesting in one of the nearby trees.

Blanche A. Pedley

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Field Trip, Kaneohe Marine Air Station, July 14, 1957

The group that visited the Booby colony on Ulupau Head on Sunday, July 14, consisted of 19 adults and 1 child.

As we drove over the Pali the rain came down in solid style, but as we drove through Kailua it had lessened, and by the time we reached the Marine Base it had stopped.

Five carloads then drove in and proceeded to observe birds. At the pond on the right as you go in were several Hawaiian Noddys with their light colored tails.

We then went on to the Booby colony where most of the group took pictures to help preserve the event in their memory.

Our observations showed us that not only the Brown Booby but also the Hawaiian Noddy and Common Noddy were nesting on the cliffs around Ulupau Head.

The following species were seen for the day:

Brown Booby . . . . .	2
Red Footed Booby . . . .	250 estimate
Frigate Bird . . . . .	18
Hawaiian Stilt . . . . .	14
Common Noddy Tern . . . .	37
Hawaiian Noddy Tern . . .	10
Sooty Tern . . . . .	36
Ruddy Turnstone . . . . .	1

## Species seen: (Continued)

Brazilian Cardinal . . . . .	1
Kentucky Cardinal. . . . .	3
Spotted Doves. . . . .	3
Barred Doves . . . . .	8
Ricebird . . . . .	5
English Sparrow . . . . .	3
White-eye. . . . .	1

We also got a good look at Moku Manu through the new telescope that the Society has purchased.

After lunch on the beach we returned home much refreshed for another week of work.

Charles Hanson

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## AUGUST ACTIVITIES:

FIELD TRIPS:      August 11 - To Kawainui trail. Mace Norton will lead.

August 25 - The first shore bird trip of the season. Migrants should be back, and with our new 'scope, we should have wonderful birding.

STARTING POINT FOR EACH TRIP:

Punchbowl Street side of the Library of Hawaii, at 8:00 a.m.

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MEETING:          August 19 - At the Aquarium Auditorium at 7:30 p.m. We are looking forward to hear Mr. William H. Elder give a report of the Nene survey.

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