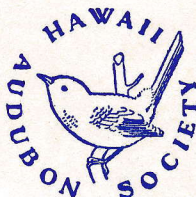


# THE ELEPAIO

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## A TRIP TO LAYSAN ISLAND By Al Labrecque

Al Stoops and I left Honolulu at 10:30 A.M., July 3rd, aboard the fishing sampan "Koyo Maru" (Happy Boat), 17 tons, 75 feet long, 30 years old, and of wooden construction. It was equipped with an electronic direction finder and a radio. The captain, Dick Shiroma, born on the Big Island, has been fishing in Hawaiian waters for ten years and certainly knows his way around the Hawaiian archipelago. The crew of six was made up of local boys of varied mixtures - Filipino, Hawaiian, Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish, French. Most of them were in their late teens; three were making their first trip.

Heading W.N.W. and traveling at a speed of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  knots, we passed Kauai and Niihau, then Nihoa, which was once inhabited by a small number of Hawaiians. Later on came Necker Island, Gardner Pinnacle, French Frigate Shoal. These are the remains of once larger volcanic islands which have been eroded to the point where only a small mass of basaltic rock lies above the surface of the sea.

There were seldom more than a dozen birds to be seen at any one time except when we were near an island, when there would, of course, be flocks of them. We never tired of watching the graceful flight of terns, boobies, albatrosses, frigate birds, petrels, shearwaters, red-tailed tropic birds and fairy terns.

At dawn of the sixth day we reached the low, sandy island of Laysan, built up by coral atop a now-submerged volcanic island. It is two miles long, one mile wide and 36 feet above sea level at its highest point. Laysan is said to be one of the greatest bird islands in the world.

The Koyo Maru anchored outside the reef, on the lee side of the island, a quarter-mile off-shore. Launching the flat-bottomed skiff, its outboard motor was started and we headed for the lagoon through a narrow "pass" in the reef. We landed on the wide, sandy beach of a beautiful small bay, where several seals were sunning themselves. The skipper and two of his crew who had come along unloaded our gear, then returned to their boat, saying they would call for us in six days. We had a pup tent, blankets, two 5 gallon cans of water, food for a week and Al's photographic equipment.

Our first concern was to set up camp, so we headed for the old camp site, a short distance from the beach, which had been vacated two or three days previously by David Woodside and Rick Warner, who had spent a few days on the island. Finding the site satisfactory we carried our gear to it, pitched our tent and made ourselves at home. Then we returned to the beach for a refreshing swim in the lagoon. We had been told to beware of sharks and we kept a look-out for them but didn't see any. Nor did we see any in this bay during our entire stay.



Next we began to explore our surroundings. Near our camp stood the one landmark of the island, a solitary ironwood tree, about 20 feet tall, with low, outspreading branches covering a diameter of some 40 feet. On one side were two frigate bird nests with young, while on the other was a booby nest, also with young. Some 50 noddy terns perched on the south side of the tree, making a pretty picture with their light-colored heads all facing in one direction - into the wind.

In the center of the island is a mile-long, narrow lake of shallow, brackish water. Between the sea beach and the lake is a strip of vegetation, consisting of beach morning glory, beach naupaka, a hardy, coarse bunch grass up to some three feet tall; heliotrope, portulaca, sedge and pickle-weed. The latter, with its round, salty, succulent leaves, served us as salad. The luxuriant nature of the vegetation indicates ample rainfall. Here and there are areas devoid of vegetation, some quite large.

Now for the birds. The Laysan albatross is the most numerous and the most noteworthy bird on the island. At this time of year the young of this species, from half-grown to almost mature, are evenly distributed over the entire island. Yet they are not crowded, each bird occupying a room-sized space. Some are among the bushes, some in bare areas. The younger birds are covered with a long, gray-brown fuzz, while the more mature ones have only a bit of fuzz left, mostly around the neck. The only semblance of a nest is found on low-lying ground near the lake. Here, small mounds of earth, each with a "moat" around it, had been made on which to lay eggs. Many of the young were still on these mounds, "holding the fort," so it seemed. A few unhatched eggs were to be found, particularly in low areas. When we passed close to young birds they would clap their bills rapidly and take three or four steps towards us, stopping as we moved past them. Both of us let ourselves be pecked by a belligerent bird. The result was only a small scratch. Now these youngsters are occupied with the difficult business of learning to fly. They exercise their wings by flapping them. They spread their wings and lean forward against the wind. They practice short flights with their feet barely touching the ground. Then longer and higher flights. We saw very few parent birds. When one came it would walk majestically to its young and nuzzle it around the neck with parental affection. The young would then begin nibbling the parent's bill, stopping occasionally to lift its own bill straight up in the air and emit short piping cries of "peet," "peet." After more bill nibbling it would insert its bill crosswise into the parent's, get some predigested kaukau, swallow it in a couple of gulps, then repeat the operation, perhaps half a dozen times.

There were a few black-footed albatrosses, sometimes several in a group, then again, an occasional one among the Laysans.

There were heavy concentrations of terns, mostly sooties, on the slopes towards the lake. They were sitting on eggs in the open, among the bushes - anywhere and everywhere. The eggs were beginning to hatch and there were already quite a few young in some areas. In some places the eggs or young were only two or three feet apart, much as on Rabbit Island. And the air was thick with flying birds.

Everywhere on higher ground were the burrows of wedge-tailed shearwaters, with occasional birds outside the burrows. Although we were careful to avoid breaking through the burrows we sometimes sank knee-deep or deeper into them. The moaning of these birds was heard everywhere, particularly at night.

Around our camp were quite a few Bulwer's petrels, which had burrows under old sheets of corrugated iron. They were mating and couples of them would bill and coo by the hour outside their burrows. They waddled with difficulty on their short legs and small feet. At night they joined the shearwaters in their eerie serenade.

There were Laysan finches in the bushes everywhere, hopping around and feeding on the seeds of the tall grass. They seldom flew, and then only for short distances.



An occasional Laysan teal visited our camp and we saw perhaps a dozen of them altogether, although they were no doubt much more numerous than this would indicate. Only one keiki was seen. Contrary to reports of other observers, we did not see any teal at or near the lake, most of them being nearer the beach. We saw three of them bathing and disporting themselves at the edge of the water at the beach. One was seen feeding on exposed coral at low tide. Others nibbled at naupaka leaves after their ablutions.

Frigate birds nested mostly on naupaka shrubs. Most of their young were some two months old. Captain Shiroma told us the Japanese name for the frigate bird is "kaizoku," which means "pirate." Having read that these birds have difficulty in "taking off" for flight, we watched with interest when one landed on its nest in a clump of naupaka to feed its young. It was pretty well "sunk" in the bushes, with its wings half folded, and we wondered how it would get out of there. But when the time came for it to leave it stretched out its wings to catch a gust of wind, which lifted it above the bushes and it was on its way with hardly a flap of its wings. The cry of the frigate birds is very much like the "kut-kut-kut" of a barnyard hen.

Red-tailed tropic birds were sitting on eggs laid on the bare sand under naupaka or clumps of grass. Others had young of different ages. One young, at the edge of our camp, nearly full-grown, made a pretty picture with its mottled cloak against a clump of grass.

On rocky outcroppings, both along the beach and inland, were those beautiful, gentle white birds, the fairy terns, with their black-rimmed eyes, black beaks and dainty feet. Their reproduction was in all stages, ranging from mating to fully grown young. Their single egg is laid on bare rock. Both egg and young are a mottled gray, like the coral rock. When we approached an egg or young the parents would hover above us, then fly away, seeking to lure us away. Their low cry is like the twang of a half-loose guitar string.

On large slabs of coral rock along some parts of the shore were bristle-thighed curlews in flocks of up to 25 birds. There were ruddy turnstones in flocks of a dozen or so, both along the ocean beach and on the lake margin.

Other birds, in lesser numbers were: gray-backed terns, with markings similar to those of the sooties, but with gray upper parts instead of black; gray-breasted shearwaters; white-breasted Bonin Island petrels.

Since the birds of Laysan are not accustomed to man it cannot be said that they are tame, but they are almost totally unafraid.

There are many other things of interest on Laysan. All around the island, on sandy beach and rocky shore, were Hawaiian monk seals, with perhaps an average of two or three per hundred yards of shore line. They sleep in the sun most of the day. Their young were already several months old, about one-fourth grown. They were quite unafraid unless we went close to them, when they would make a few hostile motions at us with their heads, then scamper, more or less in panic, for the water. Sometimes we would stroke the soft fur of a sleeping seal, which would wake up, look at us for a moment before realizing what awful creatures we were, then rush for the water. At night some of them sleep in small clearings in the naupaka patches. When we swam with them they evinced curiosity but didn't come close to us.

At the northern end of our beach was an acre of coral bed where we spent many an hour swimming with mask and snorkel. Here was a most colorful scene of algae-encrusted coral rock. There were patches of bright, vivid purple, with yellows, reds, greens. The area teemed with fish in a great variety of colors, shapes and sizes, including the ubiquitous humuhumunukunuuapuaa.



About a mile to the north of our beach was another coral bed, close inshore, which we called Shark Shoal. Here 50 sand sharks, six to eight feet in length, cruised back and forth at high tide, their dorsal and tail fins showing above the surface. A coral rock thrown into the water would attract the nearest ones to the spot.

The whole island was beautiful and interesting. We had expected excessive noise and, perhaps, strong smells. The noise wasn't too bad and there were no bad smells. In fact, at certain times of the day, the air was slightly scented, but we couldn't determine by what blossom or plant. However there WAS a fly in the ointment - or FLIES, rather millions of the most pestiferous little flies of the common house-fly variety. They didn't bite; they just promenaded on our tender epidermis, making it impossible to nap in the tent during the day unless completely covered. The sun was too hot for lying on the beach, although the daily range of temperature was about the same as that of Honolulu. Recommendation to future visitors to Laysan: Take along mosquito netting (although there are no mosquitoes).

On our fifth day on the island, upon returning from our morning excursion, we saw the Koyo Maru anchored off-shore and its skiff on the beach. Pretty soon the skipper and the members of his crew hove into sight from the south end of the island, each carrying a gunnysack full of glass balls. They told us the fishing wasn't so good around Laysan and that they would leave that evening for the return trip, stopping a couple of days at Maro Reef, to fish there. So we packed up reluctantly, took a last swim and left Laysan with much of our photographing left undone.

During our two days anchored at Maro Reef we fished for ulua (pompano) with hand lines in 120 feet of water. This was interesting, although the catch was only fair. Al and I fished with the crew at times. Before pulling up anchor some of us went for a swim in the middle of the Pacific.

We had planned to go ashore for half a day on Nihoa but the sea was too rough for a landing. As we were passing that island we were followed by two dozen brown boobies, which the crew-men called "Pancho Lopez." These centered their attention on the lure of our two trolling lines, at which they would dive, two or three at a time. Finally one of them got hooked. I pulled it in, stood it in the scupper, where it remained quiet, while I removed the hook from the thin membrane on the under-side of its throat. Then, after holding it in my arms for a minute, I tossed it into the air. Although it fluttered to the water, it immediately arose and flew away, evidently none the worse for its experience. Red-tailed tropic birds on a few occasions hovered above our lures, but decided they weren't fish and flew away.

"A rainbow in the morning is the sailor's warning;  
"A rainbow at night is the sailor's delight ... "

Hardly a morning went by without our being "warned," nor a night without our being "delighted." There were single rainbows, double ones, full rainbows and half ones; sometimes just a splotch of rainbow on cloud. The weather was quite good during the entire trip. The skipper told us the sea was rougher than usual for this time of the year. Fortunately it was fairly calm while we were anchored at Maro Reef, which made that stop more enjoyable. As if to round out our trip, old Mother Nature gave us a good bouncing on our last night afloat, between Kauai and Oahu.

Honolulu looked good to us as we entered Kewalo Basin at dawn on July 20th, where we were met by Mrs. Stoops and Michele, thanks to the ship-to-shore radio telephone.

Here in Honolulu we take TREES for granted. But how beautiful they are when you have hardly seen any for even a short three weeks!



THE BREEDING CYCLES OF HAWAIIAN SEA BIRDS, By Frank Richardson. Bernice  
P. Bishop Museum Bulletin 218, 41 pp, 1957.

Dr. Frank Richardson was in Hawaii during the years 1947-48, and returned in 1953-54 on a Yale-Bishop Museum Fellowship. Most of us in the Hawaii Audubon Society had the privilege of knowing Dr. Richardson and were all greatly inspired by his intense interest in the sea birds, as demonstrated by his willingness to risk life, limb, and epidermis to obtain information on their life histories and nesting habits.

The published results of his labors, which we have awaited with great expectancy, are presented in "The Breeding Cycles of Hawaiian Sea Birds." It will be a surprise to most bird students, whether visitors or established residents of Hawaii, to learn that 22 species of sea birds nest on the islands of the Hawaiian Archipelago. Three orders and 7 families are represented, including 2 species of albatross, 6 shearwaters and petrels, 2 storm-petrels, 2 tropic birds, 3 boobies, 1 frigate bird, and 6 terns. Twelve of the 22 species are found the world-around in the tropic zone.

In contrast to the high endemism among her forest birds, Hawaii can claim no endemic species of sea birds. As a result of the long existence and isolation of the islands, 6 races or subspecies have been recognized. Since most of these are Procellariiformes, Dr. Richardson concludes that the petrels and their allies were the first sea birds to become established in the islands. The lack of endemic races among the tropic birds and boobies may mean that these birds were fairly recent arrivals.

The breeding distribution and the breeding cycle are described for each of the 22 species. Also, the time of year when eggs are present, the length of incubation, and the time when young birds are in evidence, are all graphically portrayed.

The different species are classified according to their breeding season. Twelve species are spring and summer breeders. These include the majority of the shearwaters and petrels, both species of tropic birds, the 1 frigate bird, 1 booby, and 2 terns. There are 5 species of fall and winter breeders, including the 2 albatrosses and 1 booby. Then there are 5 species of irregular or year-round breeders. These are principally the terns and the remaining species of booby. A non-annual cycle is not found in any of the nesting species. The influence of such environmental factors as increasing and decreasing periods of daylight, availability of food, destructive storms, temperature, and such biotic factors as incubation period and competition, are each discussed. The author points out that fall and winter breeders, such as the 2 albatrosses, may have retained an inherent breeding cycle characteristic of the Southern Hemisphere. The majority of the Procellariiformes occur and do their nesting in the Southern Hemisphere. Dr. Richardson believes there is the possibility that the irregular breeders were the latest to arrive in the islands and there has not been time for regular cycles to become established.

The uninhabited islands and islets of the Hawaiian Archipelago provide a favorable habitat for sea birds with a great variety of terrain. The Leeward Group -- except for Midway -- constitutes a National Wildlife Refuge and thus receives some protection from marauders.

This study provides a comprehensive and up-to-date summary of available literature and field observations on the sea birds of the Hawaiian area of the Pacific.

Joseph E. King  
July 15, 1957



NOTES FROM TAHITI  
By Margaret Titcomb

I wish I could tell you something interesting about the birds of Tahiti. But this word will be a disappointment, I am afraid.

On the way down I saw no birds at all!

On arriving at our house, along the fairly well populated shore west of the town of Papeete, the good old mynah bird was the only thing to be seen! Later, a little "wren-like" bird was to be seen occasionally in the hedges, or in the yard. I am told it was introduced. But I have spent little time looking landward, the sea in front of us being the great attraction. So I have not yet even seen this little introduced bird except as a little brown thing modestly hopping about in the panax hedges. Others report that its brown is relieved by a bit of red on the head.

However, at sea, it is a delight to see the fairy tern circling, wheeling, flying and dipping to catch fish now and then. There are frequently two flying together. Occasionally four or five are to be seen. This lovely white bird is the Gygis alba alba, called by Tahitians the 'itata'e'. Once when out on the reef, possibly a quarter of a mile from shore, it was great exasperation not to have a camera and try to spot one as it flew very near. The little Musee de Papeete has a collection of birds, prepared at the American Museum of Natural History and given to the Papeete museum several years ago, part of the great collections of Rollo Beck. It could be seen at close range there!

Less often seen right near shore is the white-capped noddy, the Anous minutus minutus Boie, called by Tahitians the 'Oa'. On the way to Moorea several of these were seen, flying high and dipping, as well as a low-flying brown booby. It was, of course, a beautiful sight to see them wheeling and searching for fish.

One other bird has been seen -- the reef heron, Demigretta sacra sacra (Gmelin), Tahitian name, 'otu'u'. When coming home from Papeete one day, Betty Phillips had her camera and unfortunately I did not. While she was taking pictures of some water lilies, I strolled along the shore and was enchanted to see a reef heron at close range, picking its way along the water's edge, searching for food. It was so temptingly near! By the time we joined each other, the heron had flown off to a perch on a post in the water too far off for a shot.

One day some of our party had a fine trip up into one of the valleys -- Tantaua. The trail led along and sometimes across a stream, tumbling over its rocks. Not a bird to be seen!

Of course, there are a few more birds here. But I shall leave notes of their presence to those who see them. The few birds seen do give delight. Sitting on our beach at the end of the day I enjoy looking far off at the brown noddies at the reef's edge, where the fish must be easier to catch, or the minnows. But the greatest number I have seen at any time is five.

As to the mynahs, they act just as they do in Hawaii!

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MIDWAY NOTES --- " ... I saw my first Bonin Petrel chick a few days ago. It was sitting rather unhappily at the mouth of its caved-in burrow. No description can do justice to this gentle fluffy little creature. Its short stubby ebony black bill and pale gray upperparts and white underparts combine in the ultimacy of these three colors. It is always surprising to see the near perfection nature has achieved ... This little fellow was sitting fully aware probably of everything about it except its own exquisite covering ... "

Charles Schell, May 10, 1957.



## FIELD NOTES:

Field trip on the Honouliuli fire break trail, July 28, 1957.

This was perhaps a new trail for the group. Mace Norton lead the way for a party of 16 -- 9 visitors and 7 members. The trail (roadway) starts in the guava thickets, then enters eucalyptus forest and follows along the southeastern slope of the Waianae. Although the area is somewhat dry, in general aspect, there are a number of moist glens with kukui, koa, and ferns. Except for one rather light but prolonged shower, the weather was fine.

In about 2 miles of trail covered before lunch we saw or heard 2 North American cardinals, 11 leiiothrix, 10 white-eye, 12 elepaio, 7 amakihi, and a small flock of ricebirds. To my eye the amakihi were grayer than usual and lacked the yellow tint which may become very prominent at certain times and places.

Joseph King

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Field trip to Pa Lehua, August 11, 1957.

Fourteen members and guests gathered at the Library of Hawaii. After some discussion it was decided to go to Pa Lehua, instead of our scheduled trip. We were somewhat delayed by a few mechanical difficulties, and by the necessity of using a stout rope to assist in getting us to the start of the trail, but the trip was well worth the extra struggle. Amakihi were constantly heard along the way, certainly the most numerous of the native birds. Apapane were heard and seen at some distance, while the elepaio lived up to his reputation, coming very close. One inquisitive little fellow almost came to Ruth Rockafellow's knee. Leiiothrix and white-eyes were common, but the bush warbler, usually heard on this trail, was heard only once, at a distance. Two tropic birds and an owl, circling in the valley below, brought the finishing touch to a good day.

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Grenville Hatch

## SEPTEMBER ACTIVITIES:

FIELD TRIPS: Sept. 7, SATURDAY. To Popoia, taking picnic supper, flashlights, and \$1.00 for the boatman. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 3:00 p.m., or at Kailua Park (Kaneohe side of the stream) at 4:00 p.m. An almost full moon will rise at 5:49. The boatman will call for us at 9:00 p.m., after an evening with the shearwaters.

Sept. 22 - To Manoa Cliffs trail. Meet at the Punchbowl Street side of the Library of Hawaii, at 8:00 a.m.

MEETING: Sept. 16 - At the Aquarium Auditorium at 7:30 p.m. Book reviews on recent bird books will be given by several of our members.

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