

THE ELEPAIO

*Journal of the
Hawaii Audubon Society*



*For the Better Protection
of Wildlife in Hawaii*

VOLUME 18, NUMBER 5

NOVEMBER 1957

NA LAAU HAWAII AT THE CROSSROADS

By George C. Munro

Few people in Hawaii realize the extent to which cultivation, grazing, building and competition of exotics are exterminating the endemic plants of the open dryland country of Hawaii. These plants have not succeeded in cultivation, and on the waste lands foreign plants are crowding them out. Over the ages the native dryland vegetation had attained a system of rotation among species which minimized the effect of competition among themselves, but they are helpless against the competition of exotics. Practically none of the native open country dryland plants are in cultivation, though a number have been tried. These plants are so scattered that only in rare instances can they be protected where they are growing naturally. The Kanepuu dry forest on Lanai is an instance, but its flora is mostly tree growth with the smaller plants brought in from scattered locations by human agency.

My 34 years in the grazing industry on the dry country of three islands in Hawaii, making botanical collections of its plants and trying to save endemic species from extinction has given me an experience which has been useful in my efforts in the last few years on Diamond Head. From this experience came my decision, under permission from the National Guard of Hawaii, to lay a foundation on the mountain side for a "living museum" of our dryland plants, after the ideal of Nature Conservancy, which is to save examples of natural scenery as "living museums" in their natural state. As there is now probably no dryland country in Hawaii in its natural state, it must be re-created, and this we are doing by destroying the foreign growth and filling the ground with seeds of dryland plants, especially the endemics.

After much study, experimentation and consideration of other interests, we decided on a unique area of about an acre of very steep ground on the fourth ridge from Makalei. It extends from the bottom of the gulch at about 120 feet elevation on the north side, over the top of the ridge to the bottom of the gulch on the south side, giving a variety of fine soil and rocky surface conditions. The gulch on the north side turns to the south and almost joins the gulch on the south side at 275 feet elevation, leaving room for but a narrow trail on the crest of the ridge. This isolates the area from above, obviating water erosion and minimizing the encroachment of seeds of foreign plants. A peculiar and favorable feature of a part of this locality is the apparent ability of the soil to hold some moisture through the dry season, probably from a vein in the rock permitting slow seepage from storage higher up the mountain side.

Now that the foundation has been well and securely laid, all that it needs is to have the small section of the ridge set aside and secured from exploitation; to be maintained as an example of what these open drylands probably were before man disturbed the balance of nature in Hawaii. Eradication of foreign plants on the center section must be continued. More speed with this would be desirable, but it can go on as at present with the Audubon Society and other friends of the cause furnishing the funds

for chemicals and for the small amount of paid labor, which is at present only four hours a month.

Na Laau Hawaii can be a part of the Botanical Gardens now in process of establishment or under the Board of Agriculture and Forestry as it would have been had the Territorial park idea been carried through. It was then the announced intention of the Board to appoint my nephew, Hector G. Munro, who is associated with me in the undertaking, and myself, as honorary foresters to carry it on. I am very willing to do so as far as my strength permits, and Hector is willing to carry on when my lasting power runs out. The Hawaii Audubon Society has been taking a keen interest in the undertaking and I am sure will continue to do so.

In May of last year Governor Samuel Wilder King announced that a Territorial park would be established on the south and west sides of Diamond Head, which would include Na Laau Hawaii, and make it safe, but the Executive order was not signed by Governor King. Na Laau Hawaii is now at the crossroads and there is danger of the locality being taken for something else. I am aware of an expressed opinion that a park would not be "the greatest and best use" for the outer slopes of Diamond Head. But Na Laau Hawaii is situated up against the steep rugged hillside and cannot be in the way of any other improvements. It cannot block anything else as there is room only for a very narrow footpath on the crest of the ridge connecting it with the mass of the mountain, and with which the trails of Na Laau Hawaii will converge. When the trees and plants are established it will add considerably to the beauty of the hillside as viewed from Waikiki.

It is already furnishing some very interesting studies on the rotation of the plants. We have found that seed of old wiliwili trees germinates from seed broadcast among koa haole thickets, competing with them, and promising to overtop them; this will provide a very beautiful sight on the hillside. The native white poppy rotates with the kakona-kona grass, the latter holding the ground until February and the poppy then taking over, flowering in April, and continuing through the dry season. Apparently this occurs every fourth year, as far as our observations show. The Kauna'oa, a parasite, flourishes also every fourth year, but not at the same time as the other two. The wikiwiki bean which seems to germinate with the first rains grows right through the following dry season and dies when the rains of next season arrive. The seeds of dryland plants, if planted in the freshly ripened fruit, or before the seeds dry, germinate at once if moisture conditions in the soil are favorable. The common ilima flourishes, and flowers beautifully for several years and then rests for one or two years. These, and other problems are under study, and results are recorded as progress is made. Much of the life of our dryland plants is still a closed book. Na Laau Hawaii hopes to reveal some of it.

Na Laau Hawaii is not planned as a Botanical Garden or an arboretum, but as a wilderness with little interference from man after exotics are removed. I hope that all lovers of the things of old Hawaii, botanists and plant lovers will use their influence with the new Governor and Commissioner of Public Lands to have at least this small portion of the steep hillside facing Waikiki set aside and dedicated to the preservation of the endemic plants of the Hawaiian kula.

BOOK REVIEW:

"Birds of New Guinea," by Tom Iredale is illustrated by 35 plates in color, figuring 347 different kinds of birds, drawn by Lilian Medland. The two folio volumes were attractively printed by Georgian House, Melbourne, 1956.

The introduction gives a concise account of the New Guinea region, its history, ecology, the nesting habits of the birds, the avifaunal regions and references.

Then is taken up in turn each of the groups of birds, in their systematic order, but in a chatty and discursive manner, rather than formal and systematic. Each volume has an index arranged by both genus and species, and the table of contents lists the groups of birds by their popular names. There is an entire absence of author names. The plates have an artistic softness and absence of distracting numbers or names, the identifications of the species shown being carried on a facing page, which has the bird outlined, with scientific and common names adjacent.

- - - - -

I do not believe the members of the Hawaii Audubon Society realize what a great amount of valuable information has been published in the Elepaio. I am fortunate to have a complete set of the volumes to date (now in volume 17), and recently I have had occasion to skim through these volumes. They are rich in notes and papers concerning birds found in Hawaii, Japan, the Solomon Islands, and many other Pacific regions, as well as a few contributions concerning the mainland United States.

One of the past features which appeals to me especially is the many reviews of publications having to do with Hawaii and other Pacific regions. Being interested particularly in Pacific bio-bibliography, I have found that quite a number of very useful publications have been brought to my attention through these notes. I would like to register a plea that the recording of such references be continued as a regular task of the membership and the editorial staff of the Elepaio.

E. H. Bryan, Jr.

FROM HAWAII NATIONAL PARK

At the Hawaii National Park Museum, something new has been added: a young tropic bird (koa'e) now sits on the nest below the beautiful full-grown bird, poised in its flight above. Perhaps many of you have seen the exhibit, or photos of it. George C. Ruhle, Park Naturalist, has planned it all, and took part in the making.

The young bird is perhaps half grown, sits on a nest of grasses, most "naturally" arranged, and looks up complacently, half expectantly, to the mother bird. As you know, the pure white of its feathers is speckled with black crescents in the adolescent period, and the long tail feathers, like long white spears, are absent as yet.

It is altogether a most beautiful exhibit. George Ruhle was given the bird by William Elder, whom we had a chance to hear lately, in re the nene. The excellent taxidermy was done by George Lee, of Honolulu, whom we know. When you see the exhibit, don't let the gray lava rocks of the setting fool you! George Ruhle and Paul Rockwood planned and made them! One or two only are actual rocks that they stole from Pele's domain. The rest? Well- trade secret!

Margaret Titcomb
October 4, 1957

+++++

Margaret Titcomb, who is spending several weeks at the National Park, has sent a copy of the new "Self-guiding" pamphlet for the Halemaumau Trail. Notes on the plants are interestingly written, and bits of history and legend have been added to the descriptions. A map and several illustrations of plants should prove most helpful.

One long paragraph is devoted to the most common birds, which are described in sufficient detail so that they can be easily recognized. Of the linnet it is said

"he has lost the scarlet mantle that is his native haunts drapes his head and shoulders." This may be slightly confusing to some, in view of the color which is found on the head and breast of our linnets.

Grenville Hatch

FIELD NOTES:

Field Trip: Popoia, September 6, 1957.

Late in the afternoon of September sixth twenty-two persons gathered on the shore near the Lanikai Beach Park. Across from the wind-blown strand the small coral island, Popoia, was flat and apparently uninhabited by adult birds. With picnic suppers gripped in one hand and shoes held in the other hand, the group left for the island in parties of five or six being carried in Frank Gonsalves' small craft. When all were on the island people deposited parcels and paraphernalia on the side of the one sandy strip there. Then kneeling and bending figures were seen silhouetted against the background of the sea and sky. Observations of young birds were taking place.

In the burrows and holes the young birds sat shaded by overhanging coral ledges or the vegetation of vines that hung down into their shelters. Usually one baby occupied the nest. Under the denser vegetation of shrubby milo trees in the central area of the island the birds could be seen on top of the surface nestled near a trunk. The birds were silent.

As dusk arrived the picnickers devoured their meal. The adult shearwaters began to come home. Some petrels circled overhead near the water. The swooping shearwaters dived toward the island in ever increasing numbers until almost eighty silent creatures swung down through the air. As darkness increased so did the numbers of the birds. Many alighted. Groups of them sat on the flatter coral rock. As the moonlight broke through the gray blanket of clouds the cooing and moaning cry of adult shearwaters could be heard. At first like a whisper, it grew louder and infrequently a chicken-like cluck from the young broke into the chorus. The mournful wailing cry was especially audible near the low bushes.

At about nine o'clock the observers departed for the mainland shore across the moonlit water. Leaving the waves to lap against the rough coral rocks and the birds to moan, they went home with sandy feet and exhilarated spirits.

Ann Halstead

+++++

Field Trip: Pauoa Flats Trail, September 22, 1957

Manoa Cliff Trail was scheduled for September 22nd, but since at the last meeting some of the members who were on the trail very recently reported that it was quite overgrown, we decided to go to the Pauoa Flats.

Fortunately for the four members and two guests, Dr. and Mrs. A.C. Hofsommer of Webstergroves, Missouri who were here for the Orchid Show, the trail was comparatively dry except for the few mud puddles. The day was clear and sunny with occasional breeze, which added immensely toward enjoyable birding.

We left the Library at 8:10 and were on the trail by 8:40. As we parked our cars, we heard the barred and Chinese doves, the Kentucky cardinal and the leiiothrix calling from the Makiki Valley. The ricebirds were busily feeding on the grass seeds. At the beginning of the trail we counted more than ten of them flitting from one stalk of seeds to another. White-eyes were plentiful too. We were not only rewarded by bird life, but also by the most delightful scent of the white and yellow gingers.

We heard leiothrix very close at hand. Unfortunately we did not see any, but we had an excellent view of the amakihi. This bird must have been a female, for she was dull colored. She was in a koa silhouetted against the blue sky, and we were very pleased to clearly see the unmistakably curved bill. She was alternately calling and preening her feathers, as though she was expecting a caller.

The Pauoa Flats Trail did not offer much of bird life, but the large eucalyptus and the paper bark trees enchanted us completely, until we saw what was happening to them. Within five years time the bamboo has even crept over into the Pauoa section of the trail and is crowding out some of the most handsome stands of trees. The survival of the fittest is a very severe process, and the weaker trees are being choked to death by this more aggressive bamboo.

Even among these frightful battles for survival an elepaio can send out a cheerful note. A handsome male bird with its long tail cocked up in the air came flitting down the branches. We stood quietly and as we watched this bird, we meditated on the intricate display of the interweaving of the different forces of Mother Nature.

The lehua was still blooming, but there were no apapane to be seen. We think we heard one on our way back. Owls' pellets were on the trail, but we didn't see any owls flying around.

The count for the day was as follows:

| | | | |
|---------|---|-------------------|----|
| Amakihi | 5 | Kentucky cardinal | 1 |
| Apapane | 1 | Barred dove | 1 |
| Elepaio | 8 | Chinese dove | 1 |
| | | Leiothrix | 5 |
| | | Ricebird | 29 |
| | | White-eye | 24 |

On our way back we climbed Mt. Tantalus and were disappointed that the bird life was almost nil, both ascending and descending. The bamboo has completely taken over the top and has even blocked the spectacular scenic views, which were so inspiring only about five years ago.

After many hours of exciting experiences with nature, we headed for home at about 3:00 p.m.

Unoyo Kojima

FROM THE MAIL BAG:

Miss Margaret Hill writes from Ponape "I also found that the Kusaieans knew less about their birds than do any of the other people on any of the other islands in this district where I have stayed. One interesting, and puzzling thing, to me is the fact that they call the Pacific Golden Plover and the Bristle-thighed Curlew by the same name and yet I was told that neither bird is uncommon. This name 'Kulul' is definitely the name for the Pacific Golden Plover, because the Ponape and Ngatik name for it is 'Kulu', the Mokilese name is 'Kulej' and the Pingelapese is 'Kules'. So the Kusaieans have forgotten their name for the Curlew -- and someday I will try to find out why! The low islands, excepting Ngatik, have no land birds except the starling. I am not sure about Kukuoro As I remember there were not too many birds of any kind there.

