

# THE ELEPAIO

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AFOOT AND AFIELD  
By Helen Shiras Baldwin

For the past three weeks at least flocks of little birds have been flying by the writer's home at sunrise and sunset. Most of the flocks contain a dozen or more birds, but many have at least 30. Others go by singly or in twos or threes.

They are tiny birds, so small that many people would not notice them at all unless a large flock were silhouetted against the rose and golden clouds, and then for only an instant; for the birds fly swiftly with a characteristic undulating flight.

There is no formation to their flight, such as geese, plover or akekeke use in their long flights. The little birds fly in unorganized clusters from ten to thirty or more feet above the ground and rising higher to clear the tops of the tallest trees or to follow air currents.

If a flock dips low enough over the place where another bird of the same species is perching, he may rise to join them; thus the flock grows as it travels.

Always the flocks flew southeastward past the house in the morning, beginning as soon as colors appear in the eastern sky and continuing for about three quarters of an hour. At sunset the direction is reversed and the swift forms glide past the house and the Riverside and Union schools towards the northwest for about the same length of time.

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We tried in vain to glimpse distinguishing markings as they passed; though they often came so close we could hear the whistling of the air through their stiff little wing feathers. But their flight pattern and the soft "Tweep, tweep" of their call notes suggested ricebirds. (A call note is the sound members of a species of birds use to keep in touch with their family or flock, just as hiking people will whistle or yell "Yohoo" and usually get a response.)

At first we thought the birds were roosting in trees along the banks of the Wailuku; but a stroll to the river during flight time soon proved that was wrong, for flock after flock swooped down into the gulch and over. Where were they going?

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Hoping to get a better view of their flyway, we went up Amaulu Road and had scarcely left the zone of houses and trees when we saw the flocks alighting in one small patch of cane field and heard the rustling of hundreds of tiny feathered bodies among the cane leaves and the twitter of many voices.



To our surprise the birds were coming in from all directions, not just the south-east. More surprising still, flock after flock swept in from the west and northwest over cane fields to light in this one patch of a few acres. Soon thousands were flitting among the cane stalks hunting for the places among the leaves which suited them best.

It was easy to see them now, for the cane was well grown and arched over the old cane road we walked down. We could literally get within arm's reach of dozens of the little birds at one time; and how cute they looked sitting side by side on the cane leaves. With each new arrival the leaf would bend a little lower till at the maximum load of four or five birds it bent too sharply for comfort and all flitted to other leaves.

As darkness deepened, the birds grew quiet till no one would guess that thousands of them slept on the swaying cane leaves. Certainly they were as safe from predators there as anywhere, for the weight of even a rat climbing the cane stems would warn the birds to hop to other leaves. Only storms could harm them there.

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Why so many birds came to this one spot of cane and why this place was chosen no one knows. Neither is it known how many similar ricebird dormitories exist among our cane fields; nor what the birds do when one is harvested. Truly we have much to learn about this common species.

We do know that Dr. Hillebrand brought the ricebirds to Hawaii from southern Asia in the 1850's and that their behavior here follows an instinctive pattern developed for their ancestral land where autumn is a dry season when storms do not molest the grass lands.

Ricebirds nest during the rainy season in India, so build well thatched nests with the entrance holes opening downward where rain cannot enter. Ricebirds raise several broods of fast developing young per year. They cease nesting when they begin to moult. This is the time they begin gathering in flocks. By New Years they will be building nests again.

Now that rice is no longer grown in Hawaii, the ricebirds are no longer a menace to agriculture, for they damage no other crop in Hawaii. In the pastures they scatter as much seed as they eat and devour enough insects to pay for the seed they do eat. Watch them and see where they go in your neighborhood now.

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(Reprinted from the Hilo-Tribune-Herald of September 29, 1957.)

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#### BIRDING ON THE OUTLYING ISLANDS

By A. Laurence Curl of El Cerrito, California

During our visit to the Hawaiian Islands in 1957, Mrs. Curl and I spent 12 days on islands other than Oahu, as follows:

- Molokai - April 30 - to east end of island and to overlook near Kalae; to Lanai.
- Lanai - April 30 - airport only; to Maui.
- Maui (Wailuku) - April 30 - Refuge near Kahului.
  - May 1 - Refuge, Haleakala, Upper and Lower Kula Roads, Paia.
  - May 2 - Iao Valley, Lahaina and to near Lipoa Point.
  - May 3 - Refuge; to Hilo.
- Hawaii (Hilo) - May 3 - Kalapana, Kapoho.
  - May 4 - Kilauea (mostly Bird Park).



- May 5 - Akaka Falls (rain all day).  
 May 6 - to Kailua via Saddle Road.  
 Hawaii (Kailua) - May 7 - City of Refuge.  
 May 8 - Kealahou Bay (by boat); to Kauai.  
 Kauai (Lihue) - May 9 - Kilauea Lighthouse, road end beyond Haena.  
 May 10 - Waimea Canyon, Kalalau Lookout.  
 May 11 - Opaikaa Falls, Fern Grotto, Niumalu Fish Pond; to Oahu.

The birds observed on this part of the trip are summarized as follows, listing the birds in the order in which they are listed in the 1954 "Field Card of Birds of Hawaiian Islands". Numbers in parenthesis are dates above.

1. Hawaiian Hawk - H(5,7) - first near Onomea, second near Kealahou town.
2. Short-eared Owl - Mo(30, Ma(1), H(6), K(9-11)).
3. Elepaio - H(4), K(10).
4. Amakihi - H(4), K(10).
5. Anianiau - K(10) - Not uncommon near Kokee Park.
6. Apapane - H(4), K(10). Many seen along Chain of Craters Road.
7. Iiwi - H(4). One seen at Bird Park.
8. Black-crowned Night Heron - Mo(30), K(9).
9. Hawaiian Duck - K(9). Two seen at Hanalei Valley.
10. Shoveller - Mo(30), Ma(30, 1, 3).
11. Common Gallinule - K(9). Three seen near Haena.
12. Coot - Mo(30), Ma(30, 1, 3).
13. Golden Plover - Mo(30, Ma(1, 2), H(3).
14. Wandering Tattler - Mo(30), H(3), K(9).
15. Ruddy Turnstone - Mo(30), L(30), Ma(1, 3).
16. Sanderling - Ma(1).
17. Hawaiian Stilt - Ma(30, 1, 3), K(9). Seen at Kahului Refuge and a small flock at Hanalei Valley.
18. California Quail - Ma(1). Only one seen.
19. Ring-necked Pheasant - Mo(30), Ma(1), H(6), K(10, 11).
20. Green Pheasant - H(4). One seen and a number heard at Bird Park. The crow is distinctive and higher pitched than the Ring-neck.
21. Rock Dove - Ma(2), H(6). Rather scarce.
22. Chinese Spotted Dove - Mo(30), Ma(1-3), H(3, 4, 6, 7), K(9-11).
23. Barred Dove - Mo(30), Ma(30, 1, 2), H(3, 5, 6, 7, 8), K(8-11).
24. Skylark - Mo(30), Ma(1, 2), H(4, 6).
25. Chinese Thrush - K(9-11). Rather common, even in town.
26. Red-billed Leiothrix - Mo(30), Ma(2), H(4-7).
27. Mockingbird - Mo(30), Ma(2). Seen at 2 widely separated spots on Molokai.
28. Mynah - every day, all islands.
29. White-eye - every day, all islands.
30. Ricebird - Mo(30), Ma(2), H(3-7), K(9, 11).
31. English Sparrow - every day, all islands.
32. Western Meadowlark - K(9, 11).
33. N. Am. Cardinal - every day, all islands.
34. House Finch - Mo(30, Ma(1, 2), H(3, 4, 6-8), K(9-11). Appeared to be common or not uncommon on Molokai.
35. Wedge-tailed Shearwater - K(9). Two near Kilauea Lighthouse.
36. White-tailed Tropic Bird - Mo(30), H(4, 8), K(9-11). Much more common on Kauai than elsewhere - seen at Kilauea Lighthouse, cliffs near road end at Haena, Waimea Canyon, Kalalau Lookout, Waialua River canyon.
37. Red-footed Booby - K(9). A number nesting at Kilauea Lighthouse.
38. Greater Frigatebird - Mo(30), K(9). At least 6 at Kilauea Lighthouse. Also one at Waikiki on April 27.

Average number of birds seen per day: Molokai 21, Maui 15, Hawaii 11, Kauai 16.  
 All day average 14. Total species: Molokai 21, Maui 21, Hawaii 22, Kauai 25.



This summer I attended the Maine Audubon Camp, August 2-15. It was a fine experience, particularly for learning about the water birds. We made a number of trips in motor launches in Muscongus Bay and landed on several islands to see the birds on them. We saw cormorants' nests in the tops of pine trees (this is unusual), little baby Leach's petrels drawn out of their burrows and looking like little gray fluffs from a vacuum cleaner, an eider duck nest, and others. As we moved through the bay in the little open boats, the bird instructors, Allan Cruikshank and Joseph Cadbury, would call out the names of the birds we sighted -- herring and great black-backed gulls, cormorants, loons, phalaropes, great blue herons, eider ducks, ospreys, common terns, guillemots, and they would tell us interesting things about these birds. Great emphasis was placed on inter relationships between birds, plants, water, animals and on the importance of conservation.

We had sessions every morning, afternoon, and evening. Sometimes we were indoors, more often on walks on our Hog island or on the nearby mainland. We studied birds, nature, a little astronomy, a little geology, a little weather forecasting (a great sport in Maine). Then we chose either marine life, plants or insects to study especially. I chose the insect group. Dr. Donald Borer of Ohio University was the instructor for this group. His quiet but eager enthusiasm for insects could not help but arouse our interest and now I notice that I take a sharp look and perhaps an extra little poke at the insects I come across.

The Camp is terrifically educational and as enjoyable as it is educational. The director, Mr. Carl Buckheister, has a great sense of the dramatic and he saw to it that our experiences contained much emotional impact.

The main emphasis is on preparing teachers to teach nature study in schools, which is done throughout the mainland in most schools, apparently. But the 50 people in each of the five two-week camps are a well assorted group, containing doctors, nurses, housewives, clerks, firemen, and many others besides teachers.

I heartily recommend this Maine camp or any of the other Audubon camps. There are camps in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, in Wisconsin and in Connecticut.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could have a small but similar camp in Kokee or in the Hawaii National Park?

Myrna Campbell

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#### FIELD NOTES:

Field Trip: Poamoho, November 10, 1957; Aiea trail, November 16, 1957

On November 10th a group of members and friends left the Library of Hawaii at 6:00 a.m. for Poamoho trail. The weather was not propitious; rain had been falling most of the day before, which left the roads through the pineapple fields in very slippery condition, forcing us to leave the cars some distance before the entrance to the jeep road. We found the hill at the beginning of the jeep road had been recently repaired, and is now in good condition to drive over. Other evidences of recent army occupation were seen.

The grove of paper bark trees was in bloom, and although the flowering was past its peak, the trees were full of apapane. Ruth Rockafellow and I remained there to watch them, counting up to three hundred, when we desisted, although sure that our number was still low. Amakihi were also numerous, but hard to see.



The rest of the party went on up the trail, finding apapane, amakihi, elepaio and leiostrix. Between the slippery mud under foot, and the descending rain we were a bedraggled lot when we met at the cars. All reported having had a wonderful time.

Perhaps it should be added that the day following a telephone call from the Provost Marshall's office warned us that we should call them before taking the trail, as they are using live ammunition there.

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On November 16th I went up Aiea trail with two mainland birders. Here eucalyptus and paper bark were at the flowering peak, and apapane were seen by the hundreds, although no attempt was made to count them. A Japanese tit was clearly seen, remaining in one place much longer than do our native birds as a rule.

Usually the paper bark (melaleuca) and eucalyptus are at their best flowering season in December. Possibly the unusual heat this fall has caused the change?

Grenville Hatch

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Field Trip: Shore birds, November 24, 1957

On November 24 eleven members and visitors left the Library for a trip over the Pali to the Kaneohe Marine Base. Here, on the rugged hillside and along the rocky shore at the tip of Ulupau Head three or four hundred Red-footed Boobies were observed. Most of them were in adult plumage, but a few immatures were noted. A few partially completed nests were also seen. On Moku Manu Island off shore, several hundred more birds were gathered.

In addition, a few Brown Boobies were observed flying around the cliffs and over the island. Several Frigate Birds sailed gracefully overhead, also.

Back nearer the base buildings, on a low flat covered by a shallow pond, were seen three Hawaiian Tern, several Hawaiian Stilts, many Golden Plover, and a few Ruddy Turnstones. Present also were the ubiquitous Mynahs.

Returning around by the east end of Oahu, the party stopped at Kulioou Beach Park and on Paiko Peninsula for further observation. Here were noted scores of Stilts and a number of Turnstones. One Sanderling was seen and a few Wandering Tattlers.

Everywhere, as usual at this time, there were numerous Golden Plovers on the open fields along the road. No ducks were seen except one Green-winged Teal and several Mallards in a private pond.

A check was attempted at Kuapa Pond, where the party expected to find ducks; but this attempt was thwarted by a brisk shower that made observation impossible.

H. W. Clark

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At the annual meeting in December the 1958 Board of Trustees were elected. We thank the 1957 Board most heartily for their successful guidance of our Society during the past year. We hope, indeed, we are sure that we shall have the continued support and advice of the two retiring members, Margaret Newman and Margaret Titcomb. We are fortunate in being able to retain three experienced members, Blanche Pedley as our able treasurer, and Joseph King and Charles Hanson, as president and vice president; and in securing two other capable members, Ruth Rockafellow and Tom McGuire to fill the remaining offices. We are assured of a good year, with this leadership, but let us



remember that they cannot do it alone. These busy people are taking on, for the sake of our Society, added responsibility -- let us do what we can to help!

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The Hawaii Audubon Society is pleased to announce that we have a few copies of George C. Munro's "Birds of Hawaii", now out of print, which may be purchased from the Society for \$5.00. These are new books, bound in fabricoid.

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We were all delighted to have Billie Pyle, with her small Peter, here for a short visit in November. She reports Bob well, but too immersed in his studies to be able to get away at this time. Peter is an enchanting baby, amiable and friendly, as might be expected, with such parents! We will hope for other visits later from all three of them.

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From the Mail Bag:

The ELEPAIO continues as interesting as ever and a pleasant reminder of our 1955-56 visit to the islands, and field trips with you birders. We should have stayed with you longer as assurance that we would always recognize trail names and places reported on in print... Our greetings to the club and its officers, and particularly to those following who made it easy for a visitor to become one of you during our stay: Ruth Rockafellow, Grace Gossard Gregg, Blanche Pedley, Grenville Hatch, Art Nakagami at the Zoo and in whose jeep I first set out with you, Hanson, and a lot of others. This will have to serve in lieu of a personal note to each of them for the present...

Ethel and Ed Wilson

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#### JANUARY ACTIVITIES:

FIELD TRIPS:      January 12 - to the Wahiawa trail leading to the Koolaus. This will be a new trail for the Society, and one that has been highly recommended.

January 26 - for shore birds and waterfowl, we will visit West Loch, Salt Lake, Makalapa Flats, and Damon Pond.

#### STARTING POINT FOR EACH TRIP:

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

MEETING:          January 20 - at the Aquarium Auditorium at 8:30 p.m. Al Stoops will show the slides which he took on his recent trip to Laysan.

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