

# THE ELEPAIO

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## WILDLIFE OF LAYSAN ISLAND

By Rick Warner

Higher and higher grew the pile of duffel and equipment on the boat deck of the gleaming white Coast Guard Cutter Matagorda. Boxes, bundles, cages, and gear of all description littered the deck as piece by piece the supplies for our impending journey to Laysan Island came aboard. By 5 PM on Friday, May 23, 1958, things had been placed in order; the formalin jars, canned goods and finch cages carefully packed and lashed down in anticipation of the roll and pitch of the open ocean. Empty tins for 100 gallons of water were brought aboard, to be filled from the ship's water stores the day of landing. And to those of us so dependent upon these supplies the completion of the task of loading was a time of relaxation and momentary ease.

Departure time from Honolulu was scheduled for 7 PM, Saturday, May 24, and as we stood on the bridge that afternoon watching the final preparatory activities of the crew all five of our party felt the same keen thrill of anticipation. Months of planning and preparation had preceded this moment, and we savored each sound and movement with the pleasure that comes only after protracted expectation. Promptly at 1900 hours the signal was given and the spring lines and main hawsers were slipped. A faint throbbing welled from the depths of the ship and slowly the space between vessel and dock widened. In the fading light of late evening we waved farewell to the many friends and families who had come down to the wharf to see the ship off on its long voyage to Ocean Station Victor, somewhere in the Pacific Ocean between Midway and Japan, and as the first stars twinkled through the deepening blue of the night sky we passed through the harbour entrance and set our course WNW for the leeward islands of the Hawaiian chain.

The next two days passed slowly as we worked our way toward French Frigate Shoals, which was to be our first landfall. A brief stop to unload supplies allowed sufficient time for our party to go ashore on Tern Island, which houses the Loran staff and upon which is constructed a coral-surfaced runway. A quick census of the island's bird population indicated less than a dozen Laysan albatross, an occasional wedge-tailed shearwater, and a few red-tailed tropic birds, as well as the ever-present but never abundant wandering tattler, Pacific golden plover and ruddy turnstone. Only a few old-looking carcasses remained of the once prolific colony of sooty terns, relicts undoubtedly of the successful campaign to frighten or drive this species from the island.

By 1400 hours on Monday, May 26, we were again underway; the next landfall, according to the navigator, was our long-awaited Laysan Island which should, with no change of speed, be visible to us by noon on Tuesday, May 27. As the hours slipped by our spirits became even more buoyant, for at last it was apparent that we would indeed be successful in reaching Laysan. Several times we had had to revamp our plans because of complications. Military security on Midway very nearly scuttled our original



itinerary for departure from Midway to Laysan, hence to Lisianski Island, then back to Honolulu; and the plan finally collapsed like a punctured balloon when the Coast Guard vessel scheduled to transport us from Midway to Laysan Island developed engine trouble at sea and was forced to proceed directly to Honolulu.

However, after retrenching, through the very generous cooperation of the 14th Coast Guard District at Honolulu we were finally reaching our destination. Our party consisted of five men: Dr. Prent Burtis had flown all the way from Palo Alto, California to make the trip with us. Prent, a diagnostician with a keen interest in birds, is an accomplished oologist. Dr. Ted Landers, an industrial arts specialist from New Jersey, had come to Hawaii to teach at Punahou for a year, and liked it so well he stayed on. He is an avid photographer, and willing contributor to our project. Lt. JG Dick Takahashi, USN, at Midway had worked continually with Dale Rice, Resident Biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Midway, in planning and preparing for this trip, and the two of them had spent many hours working out details of the studies Dale wanted to pursue while on Laysan. Dale had been assigned to the Albatross study on Midway last year, and the information he hoped to glean from Laysan would contribute materially to his work on Midway. The writer, a biologist with the Division of Fish and Game of the Board of Agriculture and Forestry, had visited Laysan Island the previous year, had become thoroughly fascinated with the profusion of birdlife there, and was taking this opportunity to pursue further studies. From the start we were all highly satisfied with each other, and were confident of the abilities and judgement of the rest of the party members.

Shortly after 1200 hours on Tuesday, 27 May, the glistening white shoreline of Laysan Island appeared on the horizon. As we approached we could make out the green blob of the only living tree on the island. This single windswept, sprawling ironwood tree was the only landmark of any prominence to be seen anywhere. The rest of the island was flat, rising perhaps a maximum of thirty feet above sea level at its highest point, and covered where at all with low shrubs and grasses. The navigator would call out bearings, first from one tip of the island, then from the ironwood tree; when one day that specimen is gone I suspect that more creatures than the birds that nest in it now will mourn its passing.

Landing the mountain of equipment and supplies was a chore, but with the help of the crew of the Matagorda was finally accomplished. Camp was established on the high point of the island near the old residence building, now collapsed, where the Schlemmer family once lived. Tents were raised beneath specially constructed bamboo pole frames which were calculated to resist the heavy winds that occasionally sweep over the island. By evening of 27 May, the camp was in order and our party, now totally inundated by the clamorous cacophony of sound and movement, that unceasingly prevailed the consciousness, gave itself up to the sights and sounds of which it was to be a part for two weeks. Wherever we looked there was movement and activity; from every corner of the island poured the croaks, groans, clacks, yammers and twitters of the twenty different species of birds all breeding, nesting and rearing their young on this remote bit of sand and scaevola. The numbers of individuals bordered on the fantastic, and when we eventually made censuses we were dumfounded.

The major projects which we hoped to accomplish before leaving Laysan were several in number, and perhaps too ambitious. We planned to 1) census the albatross, ducks (Laysan teal), finches, boobies, and seals; 2) band 3000 albatross young; 3) make botanical and insect collections; 4) capture alive some ducks and finches to take back to Honolulu, the ducks ultimately to be shipped to zoos and aviculturists throughout the world to guarantee the perpetuation of the species; 5) collect a specimen of the monk seal for the British Museum; 6) tag as many monk seal young as possible; 7) make a vegetative survey to establish a base for future studies of the recovery of the island's vegetation; and 8) if possible to do a topographic and biological study of the island's central lagoon. Some of these projects saw successful completion; others



were only partially accomplished, and still others (most unfortunately, of course) will require our return to the island at some later date.

The natural variation of interests in the members of our party dictated the division of labor in tackling the many jobs. However, we soon found that, probably due to the heat of the sun and the soft sand, our energies were quickly sapped if we worked vigorously during the warmer daylight hours, and consequently most of us developed strong nocturnal instincts. Dick Takahashi experienced the first bit of bad luck when he was rather severely bitten while Dale Rice and he were attempting to tag and take measurements of a monk seal, which apparently developed a nasty disposition over having a cattle tag clipped onto his hind flipper.

To be continued

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MOKU MANU, June, 1958  
By Chuck Hanson

After a wet trip in an open eighteen foot boat, Al and Lois Stoops and I were landed on Moku Manu about 9:00 a.m. on June 8. Our boatman ran his boat right up on a flat reef and we quickly unloaded our gear. We planned to stay for two days and one night at least so we had a good supply of water and food.

We had planned this trip for some time as Al had wanted to make a movie of the adventure and I'd wanted to increase my collection of Kodachromes on Hawaiian Birds.

We spent the first morning in going over the top of the island and finding the location of various species. It was during this first morning that we were thrilled to see a Red-tailed Tropic Bird hovering overhead.

After dinner and a nap we went to the southwest part of the island to get some pictures of the Masked Booby nest that we had seen there. As luck would have it, neither parent was there, but there were two young which appeared to be 6 or 8 weeks apart in age. Apparently they were from two settings.

After more investigation of that area of the island, we returned to our camp site on the beach and had supper. We then prepared our air mattresses and sleeping bags and sat around our beach fire for awhile before retiring. I might mention here that the activity of the birds did not seem to cease during the night as evidenced by the sounds of flying and calling incessantly.

The next morning we were up as soon as it was light so that we could get a good start on the filming activity of the day. We went back and succeeded in photographing the adult Masked Booby. We then started climbing up the cliffs to get to the top where many of the birds congregate. On our way we were checking the burrows for Shearwaters when we made two very interesting discoveries. The first was the nest of a Bulwer's Petrel with an adult and one egg. The next was a Christmas Island Shearwater with a chick. By this time, of course, our joy knew no bounds. There were also many of the Wedge-tailed Shearwaters in evidence.

We reached the top of the island and were filming different items when we noticed that the Boobies had a tendency to roost on our heads. So Lois sat on a rock and we posed her for a movie. Sure enough, an immature Red-footed Booby landed on her head. We hope to see that film soon.

After dinner and another good siesta, we continued our film story. Towards evening we made one last good discovery. On the north side of the island on the cliffs we found a good nesting colony of Hawaiian Terns.



Our boatman didn't show up because of the rough water so we spent another night on the beach. However, he arrived early the next morning and we were taken aboard. The highlight of this was the beautiful dive by Lois and the swim to the boat.

Following is a list of varieties of birds seen on the excursion:

BIRDS NESTING

Brown Booby  
Red-footed Booby  
Masked Booby  
Sooty Tern  
Noddy Tern (common)  
Hawaiian Tern  
Wedge-tailed Shearwater  
Christmas Island Shearwater  
Bulwer's Petrel

OTHER BIRDS

Frigate Bird  
Red-tailed Tropic Bird  
Gray-backed Tern  
Sanderling  
Wandering Tattler  
Ruddy Turnstone

We wish that you had been along.

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BOOK REVIEWS:

Greenway, James C., Jr. Extinct and Vanishing Birds of the World. N.Y., American Committee for International Wild Life Protection, 1958. (Special publication No. 13) 518 p. \$5.00.

Many species of birds are now extinct or nearly so, and many others are threatened. "In order to try to avoid the total disappearance of the threatened species, a thorough study of the extinct and nearly extinct ones is a first necessity." This is the theme of Mr. Greenway's book.

One section lists species and subspecies known to be extinct, those probably extinct, those known only from recent osseous remains, those considered hypothetical and known only by pictures and not too accurate descriptions of travelers of long ago, small populations thought to be in danger of extinction and some rare birds probably not in immediate danger.

Another, and the largest section, describes extinct and vanishing forms. For each is given the scientific name, common name when known, the status, range, habitat and habits, and when possible location of specimens.

Mr. Greenway points out that island faunas and those of North America have borne the brunt of "sudden and devastating incursion of modern Europeans" and it is to those areas he limits his discussion. This of course includes Hawaii and other Pacific islands. Hawaii has the longest list of extinct birds - 26 kinds.

An extensive bibliography and a good index have been prepared. A frontispiece in color and many excellent illustrations in black and white were done by D.M. Reid-Henry. The illustration of the St. Kitts bullfinch was done by Henry Seidel.

Euphie Shields

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Medeiros, Joseph S. Present Status of Migratory Waterfowl in Hawaii. The Journal of Wildlife Management, Vol. 22, No. 2, April 1958, pp. 109-117.

This paper describes a six year study of migratory ducks in Hawaii, undertaken with a view to determining whether ducks which come to the islands are regular migrants or



casuals. A banding program was instituted, which showed that a group of regular migrants undoubtedly forms a core of leadership to Hawaii. Thus the conclusion is drawn that a single open season might wipe out for all time duck migration to the islands.

The study is full of information of great interest to us. Maps and tables show the areas which provide gathering places for the ducks on the main islands. The origin and probable routes of travel, both coming and going, are indicated. Charts show the dates, by two-week intervals, of arrival and departure of pintails and shovelers. Pintails arrive in Hawaii approximately two weeks earlier than do shovelers, and move between the islands, whereas shovelers tend to remain in the area in which they first settle. The great majority of ducks leave during a one week period.

Grenville Hatch

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#### FIELD NOTES:

Field Trip, May 24, 1958, Aiea Trail. (From one of our young guests.)

Dear Aunt Coco: I want to thank you for allowing my friend and I to go on the bird walk and nature hike with your club on May 24th. I particularly enjoyed the Forest Ranger's talk on the Hawaiian plants and their many uses -- the hike was lots of fun and I enjoyed seeing and hearing the birds and I hope I can be included again some time.

Sincerely,

Bill S. Peters

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Field Trip, June 22, 1958, Judd Trail.

Our Hawaii Audubon Society walk of June 22d took twenty-two members and guests along the Judd Trail in Nuuanu Valley. The weather was ideal. Part of the trail passes through a planting of Norfolk Island pine in Territorial forest reserve. This and several other plants of interest, both indigenous and introduced varieties, were observed. Miss Hatch gave a discussion on each. The trail passes from the drier portion in the area of the Norfolk Island pines into the lush valley of the Nuuanu stream. More birds were heard than seen, particularly the Leiothrix (*L. lutea*) or babbler, and the Shama thrush (*Kittacincula macroura*). Curiously these birds are our best singers though importations from the Orient.

The Norfolk Island pine is of particular interest. It is native only on Norfolk Island in the South Pacific and belongs to a small family the Araucariaceae which consists of two genera and about thirty species as distinguished from the true pine (*Pinaceae*) which has nine genera and about two hundred species.

After this most pleasant outing we met at the home of Miss Hatch for a leisurely supper. The Leiothrix was observed here at the feeding tray.

Ray Greenfield

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Field Trip, July 13, 1958, Aiea Trail.

The trip scheduled for July 13th was to Manoa Falls but after the group got together at the library it was decided because of the rain to go to Aiea Heights instead. We were happy to have with us quite a number of visitors and especially happy that several of these were prospective junior members. There were twenty-seven making the trip.

It did rain on us several times and the birds were quite shy, but in spite of all this, our visitors seemed not too disappointed as all were very interested in the plant life along the trail as well as in the birds.

We heard Leiothrix and White-eye all along the trail but saw very few. A few



Elepaio were seen as were some Apapane and Amakihi. Both on the way up the trail and on the way down several of us were fortunate enough to get an excellent view of an Amakihi feeding on a tree branch from which there appeared to be sap oozing. The bird returned to the branch several times as we stood watching. I have not seen many of these birds at close hand and so was surprised to see one so nearly gray in color. Although no Japanese Tit were seen this trip, Joe King heard one calling.

No attempt was made to count the birds seen but the following species were observed:

Amakihi	Brazilian Cardinal	Mynah
Apapane	N.American Cardinal	Ricebird
Elepaio	Chinese Dove	Japanese Tit (Heard)
	House Finch	White-eye
	Leiiothrix	

Blanche A. Pedley

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CORRECTION: The account of the field trip of June 8, 1958, to Waimano Trail was written by Joan Miller.

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#### AUGUST ACTIVITIES:

FIELD TRIPS: JOE KING WILL LEAD AUGUST TRIPS.

August 10 - To our old favorite, Poamoho Trail. Recent visits there by our members have resulted in good counts; sights of Iiwi, and the Garrulax has been heard. Note the starting hour.

Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 6:00 a.m.

August 23 - SATURDAY. To Popoia to see and hear the Wedge-tailed Shearwaters. Bring picnic supper, sweater and flashlight. We will return from the island about 9:00 p.m. Boat fare is \$1.00 per person.

Meet at Library of Hawaii at 4:00 p.m. The boatman will take us to the island at 5:00 p.m.

MEETING: August 18 - At the Aquarium auditorium at 7:30 p.m. Our President, Joseph King, will show slides and talk on a recent trip to equatorial Pacific, including Tahiti and the Marquesas.

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