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## SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE BIRDS OF TAHITI AND THE MARQUESAS ISLANDS

By Joseph E. King

During the course of a recent oceanographic voyage of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service vessel, Hugh M. Smith, I had the opportunity to spend three days ashore on Tahiti, mostly at or near the town of Papeete, and about one month in the Marquesas Islands, with frequent visits ashore on several of the islands. Prior to the cruise I paid a visit to the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu and, through the kind efforts of Edwin H. Bryan, Jr., was provided with abstracts of the available literature on the birds of Tahiti and the Marquesas which, needless to say, were extremely helpful. I also profited by a letter of introduction from Margaret Titcomb, Librarian of the Bishop Museum, to her friend Aurora Natua of the Tahiti Museum in Papeete.

On the day after my arrival in Papeete I visited the museum, studied their bird exhibits, and had an interesting talk with Mlle. Natua. I hope the following statement does not do someone an injustice, but from what I could learn there seems to be no one presently living in Tahiti who is familiar with, or interested in, the bird-life of the Society Islands. And there are no bird, natural history, or scientific societies in Tahiti--a condition which I found rather surprising and regrettable. I was not able, therefore, to meet anyone who could tell me where to go to see the rarer land birds. Among the birds on exhibit at the museum, Mlle. Natua pointed out the few species which she thought were still existent but indicated that several of these were quite rare and difficult to find. She suggested that I take a trail leading up one of the valleys adjacent to the town, which I managed to find and on which saw several things of interest.

The following list of land and shore birds sighted May 3-5, 1958, is not presented, therefore, as a complete list of the species occurring on Tahiti, but rather are those birds which any visitor may see without great difficulty:

Reef Heron (Demigretta sacra). Common along the shoreline; all examples sighted were in the dark-gray color phase.

Wandering Tattler (Heteroscelus incanus). Seen and heard occasionally along the rocky sections of the shoreline.

Swiftlet (Collocalia leucophaea). Sighted in small flocks at mid-elevation in a deep, moist valley above the town. (I did not see the swallow which is supposed to occur here.)

Reed Warbler (Conopoderas caffra). A beautiful songster; observed in heavy forest at mid-elevation.

Mynah (Acridotheres tristis). Common to abundant in the town of Papeete and surrounding countryside.

Pigeon (Columba livia). Common in town and along the waterfront.

Sydney Wax-bill (Domacicola castaneothorax). Small flocks were seen along the roadside in forested areas above the town.



White-eye (Zosterops sp.). Only a few were seen, in the same area as the Wax-bill.

White Tern (Gygis alba). Listed as a land bird since it was always in view flying directly over the town, along the waterfront, or silhouetted against the green vegetation of the mountainside.

White-tailed Tropic-Bird (Phaethon lepturus). Commonly sighted in the deep, moist valleys at mid-elevation.

It was the opinion of Mlle. Natua that few or none of the 50 or 55 species of finches and other birds introduced by Eastham and Carrie Guild in the 1920's had become established. I had hoped to obtain more information on the success of these introductions but was unable to do so.

The following is a list of the sea birds sighted in early May 1958 within a day's run (about 200 miles) of Tahiti, and with a rough indication of their relative abundance:

Sooty Shearwater (Puffinus griseus). Common.

Tahiti Petrel (Pterodroma rostrata). Numerous.

Cook's Petrel (Pterodroma cookii). Numerous.

Bulwer's Petrel (Bulweria bulwerii). Common.

White-tailed Tropic-bird (Phaethon lepturus). Numerous.

Lesser Frigate-bird (Fregata ariel). Numerous.

Red-footed Booby (Sula sula). Numerous.

Blue-faced Booby (Sula dactylatra). Uncommon.

Sooty Tern (Sterna fuscata). Abundant.

Crested Tern (Thalasseus bergii). A small flock was observed in the harbor of Papeete.

Common Noddy (Anous stolidus). Common.

White-capped Noddy (Anous minutus). Abundant.

White Tern (Gygis alba). Abundant.

Most of the above forms occur generally throughout the central equatorial Pacific. I have seen the Crested Tern, however, in only one other locality--Christmas Island of the Line Islands. Other species, such as the Brown Booby, and certain other shearwaters, petrels and terns, occur here but were not sighted on our particular visit.

The Marquesas are high islands of volcanic origin, very similar in general respects to Tahiti and not differing greatly--superficially at least--from Hawaii, except for a scarcity of tall forest trees. Haole koa covers the mountainsides at lower elevations; staghorn fern forms dense mats near the mountain tops and in the more moist valleys there are dense thickets of hau, guava and banana. Groves of coconut trees, from which the nuts are harvested for copra, extend up the valleys from the coastline. The islands provide very rugged and beautiful scenery, but are disappointing bird-wise. My opportunities to look for birds in the uninhabited areas at middle and high elevations were very limited, which may explain my failure to see some of the endemic species which are supposed to occur here, such as the flycatcher (Pomarea sp.), the rail (Porzanaioidea sp.), and the kingfisher (Halcyon sp.).

The following species of land and shore birds were sighted in the Marquesas Islands during the latter part of May and early June 1958:

Reef Heron (Demigretta sacra). Common along the coastlines of all the major islands; those examples sighted were in the dark-gray color phase.

Wandering Tattler (Heteroscelus incanus). Common along the coastlines of the major islands; observed at Nuku Hiva as late as June 12th, the day of our departure.

Swiftlet (Collocalia ocista). Abundant at all elevations on Nuku Hiva and Hiva Oa.

Reed Warbler (Conopoderas caffra). Numerous on Nuku Hiva and Hiva Oa; frequents the taller trees; has a spectacular song but is difficult to observe.



Mynah (Acridotheres tristis). Numerous on Hiva Oa but not sighted on the other islands.

Fruit Pigeon (Ptilopus dupetithoursi). One specimen sighted at Taipi Vahi, Nuku Hiva, was judged to be this species.

Pigeon (Columba livia). Flocks of what appeared to be the common pigeon were observed nesting on high, dry cliffs along the west coast of Hiva Oa. The birds were observed only from a distance and may possibly have been the Saddle-billed Pigeon (Serresius galeatus) which is reported to occur on the island.

Sydney Wax-bill (Domacicola castaneothorax). Seen only at the village of Atuona, Hiva Oa.

Chestnut-eared Finch (Taeniopugia castanotis). Sighted on both Nuku Hiva and Hiva Oa.

White Tern (Gygis alba). Abundant on all the islands; always in view, circling over the valleys and along the mountain sides, usually in pairs.

Franklin's Gull (Larus pipixcan). One pair appeared in the bay at Taio Hae, Nuku Hiva, on May 15th, and remained there until May 25th. Both birds were black headed, in typical summer plumage.

The following is a list of the sea birds sighted in the area of the Marquesas Islands during the latter part of May and early June 1958, with an indication of their relative abundance:

Sooty Shearwater (Puffinus griseus). Common.

Christmas Shearwater (Puffinus nativitatus). Uncommon.

Dusky Shearwater (Puffinus assimilis). Common.

Audubon's Shearwater (Puffinus lherminieri). Uncommon.

Tahiti Petrel (Pterodroma rostrata). Numerous.

Phoenix Petrel (Pterodroma alba). Common.

Hawaiian or Dark-rumped Petrel (Pterodroma phaeopygia). Uncommon.

Cook's Petrel (Pterodroma cookii). Numerous.

Bulwer's Petrel (Bulweria bulwerii). Numerous.

White-throated Storm-petrel (Nesofregatta albigularis). Numerous.

Madeiran Storm-petrel (Oceanodroma leucorhoa). Uncommon.

Red-billed Tropic-bird (Phaethon aethereus). Uncommon.

Red-tailed Tropic-bird (Phaethon rubricauda). Common.

White-tailed Tropic-bird (Phaethon lepturus). Numerous.

Great Frigate-bird (Fregata minor). Most likely present but not definitely distinguished from the species below.

Lesser Frigate-bird (Fregata ariel). Numerous.

Red-footed Booby (Sula sula). Numerous. Usually much darker on the upper wing surfaces than those in Hawaii.

Blue-faced Booby (Sula dactylatra). Uncommon.

Brown Booby (Sula leucogaster). Common.

Sooty Tern (Sterna fuscata). Abundant.

Gray-backed or Spectacled Tern (Sterna lunata). Uncommon

Blue-gray Noddy (Procelsterna cerulea). Numerous.

Common Noddy (Anous stolidus). Common.

White-capped Noddy (Anous minutus). Abundant

White Tern (Cygis alba). Abundant.

Of the many specific items of interest seen on the trip I would like to tell you of three. The first concerns the unusual flight habit of the White-throated Storm-petrel. This little bird, with striking black and white plumage, "skips" along the surface of the water, usually gliding with very little wing motion, and at more or less regular intervals appears to drag one foot in the water for just an instant. Occasionally one wing tip also appears to touch the water. There was opportunity to study a number of these birds at close range, and they all displayed this unusual flight pattern. One wonders if it may be a behavior trait related to food gathering. I have not seen it previously described in the literature.



Second: A Lesser Frigate-bird was seen to engage in typical "cat-and-mouse" play. Starting at about 200 feet in the air it dropped a fish from its beak, allowed it to fall 20 or 25 feet, dived and recovered the fish; then repeated the process, dropping and recovering the fish four or five times before it finally reached the water surface. Of possible significance--the frigate was a young bird in immature plumage.

Third: One morning a Red-footed Booby, flying alongside the ship, was suddenly enveloped by a large school (or flock?) of flying fish which had taken to the air when alarmed by the vessel. It would be difficult to say which was the more astonished, the bird or the fish. There were flying fish above, below, and to each side of the booby--a situation which probably every booby dreams about but rarely attains. The bird soon recovered its senses, made a couple of fast passes at the nearest fish, and appeared to catch at least one before the fish realized their mistake and regained the doubtful security of the water.

Such rather minor events can do much to relieve the monotony of a long ocean voyage.

July 21, 1958.

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#### SOME OBSERVATIONS AT KANEOHE MARINE AIR STATION AND KAELEPULU POND

By R. L. Pyle

During a trip to Kaneohe, Ulupau Head and Kaelepulu Pond August 3, 1958, the following observations were made:

Chinese Thrush: We heard one of these thrushes singing along the main road about a quarter mile outside the gate to Kaneohe Air Station. Much to our surprise, we located the bird perched fully exposed on the top twig of a dead bush, about 20 feet above the ground and just a few feet from the edge of the highway. This individual was rich orange-brown in color, noticeably lighter than normal for this species, and we wondered if it might have been a young bird of the year.

Red-footed Booby: We estimated at least 150 birds present at the Ulupau Head nesting colony, of which one third to one half were young birds. Most of the young birds were in the later stages of development, although adults were incubating eggs on at least two nests. Many more boobies could be seen on Moku Manu.

Golden Plover and Ruddy Turnstone: At least 100 plovers and at least 20 turnstones were frequenting the drying mud flats at Kaelepulu Pond, although they were too far distant to get an accurate count. Many of the plovers still had dark underparts. No other migrant waders were seen either at Kaelepulu or on the Kaneohe Air Station Ponds.

Hawaiian Stilt: At Kaelepulu Pond a pair of stilts showed great alarm and concern over our presence near the usual access point at the edge of the area. It seemed evident that this pair was or had been nesting nearby. Six or eight other stilts could be seen at the small ponds in the far distance, and perhaps more were there. About the same number were observed at the Kaneohe Air Station ponds.

Billie and I enjoyed immensely this return visit to a couple of our favorite birding spots, and we especially enjoyed the fine companionship of Grenville Hatch and Joe King. Although Peter Pyle in years to come may not remember the day, we have photographic souvenirs of his introduction to this unique spot and his first encounter with boobies.



GROWTH PATTERNS OF SOME NATIVE PLANTS  
AT NA LAAU HAWAII IN 1958  
By George C. Munro

After experimenting for five years and ten months at Na Laau Hawaii with the Hawaiian puakauahi or awikiwiki bean (Canavalia galeata) we seem to have reached success as we now have three plants flowering profusely and producing fine seed pods. Last year one of them matured two very poor looking beans. They ripened just when the rains started and one seed was planted as taken from the pod. It germinated at once and has grown into a nice plant. Of many ripe and dry seeds planted at various times only a few have germinated.

We found that when we watered plants of this species during the dry season they died when the winter rains started. The three flowering now have never been watered and having struck a favorable year are producing. If the seeds mature when the winter rains start seed will be planted over all of Na Laau Hawaii to establish it quickly. We do not now work with nursery plants as we did in the first years at Na Laau Hawaii. We had but little success as there was no water supply and no time to use it effectively.

The flower of these plants is produced up to six in a cluster, two of which are open at a time. One is a very delicate white with an extremely light tinge of pink; the other, apparently the older flower, is pink.

About 1915, before the pineapple lands were plowed, I found at about 1300 feet elevation, where pineapples now grow, two or three plants of this variety of the species. I did not find it elsewhere on Lanai. Seed was gathered and planted on the borders of the Kanepuu dry forest. They became established on the small areas there and withstood the grazing and trampling of cattle from 1935 till 1950 and are still there. It is from these that we got seed in 1953 for Na Laau Hawaii.

Seed of the other two varieties are in the ground at Na Laau Hawaii but no plants have so far matured there. When they do it will be interesting to compare them when growing under the same conditions in the same locality as the other bean. I do not know if their flowers are light colored when first open. The shoreside variety always had pink flowers and the one I saw blooming near the forest always had purplish flowers.

It is probably from the habit of some of the seed lying dormant in the ground for long periods that it survived, with other of the dryland plants I brought there, such as the tree form of Hibiscus brackenridgii and Abutilon eremitopetalum. The later has recently been rediscovered there. It is not known if either of these are now to be found in their original habitat on the Kalulu lands on the east side of the Lanai mountains; cattle and deer may have destroyed them.

Regarding the Hawaiian poppy, puakala (Argemone alba var glauca) of which we had two plants last year that flowered from April till December, one produced much seed, all of which was saved; the other flowered heavily but was infertile. Instead of dying as I expected they started flowering again in March this year and are now about four feet high and still flowering but apparently near the end.

The puakala is a plant of the kula and does not thrive in shade but we will plant the seed over all of Na Laau Hawaii as at some future time conditions will favor it in some localities. A mass of it flowering on the hill side will be spectacular from Waikiki. It and the awikiwiki bean would make fine garden plants if they can be grown in cultivation.

The kakonakona grass (Panicum cinerium) which we did not expect to be flourishing this season was in greater quantity than usual in its off years but grew only about two feet high. It seeded and dried out completely early in 1958. These three are all endemic to Hawaii.



The mao (Abutilon incanum) (indigenous but not endemic) which in the early 1950s was flourishing and was set back later by droughts and blights has made a wonderful recovery in the last two years. Bunches of this much branched ornamental shrub are now about three feet high covered with seed capsules and leaves still fresh.

The kukui tree (Alurites moluccana) that grew from seed of a freshly ripened fruit is still thriving without any care. It is now passing through its third dry season. Where this tree will grow under the conditions at Na Laau Hawaii many others of our dryland trees and smaller plants will thrive when seed we have planted germinates.

June 20, 1958.

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#### SEPTEMBER ACTIVITIES:

FIELD TRIPS: GRENVILLE HATCH WILL LEAD SEPTEMBER TRIPS.

September 14 - To Kalena. We have not been on this trip for some years. Birding here used to be very good. We shall not cover much distance, but there is a very steep climb through brush at the beginning.

September 28 - To West Loch and Salt Lake, for shore birds.

Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 7:00 a.m. for each trip.

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MEETING: September 15 - At the Aquarium auditorium at 7:30 p.m.  
"Bird Cities of Oahu," slides in color, with a few in black and white, will be presented by Mason Rutherford, narrator, Rex Elliott, and Bill Ward. Some seldom-visited nesting areas will be shown.

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