

# THE ELEPAIO

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## WILD GOOSE CHASE ON HAWAII, 1958 By Helen S. Baldwin

The first thing that our friends, Bob and Billie Pyle, wanted to do when they visited us in Hilo in mid August this year was to go on a wild goose chase, a literal one for they wanted to see nene in the wild, not merely the semi-domestic ones in their goose Utopia at the Pohakuloa Game Reservation. How wild it would be we had only the vaguest notion at the time.

So after an early supper the day of their arrival, we took off up the Saddle Road which twists through forest and over lava flows up and across the plane at 6,000 feet elevation between Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa and down the other side to Kona. But we stopped at the 1855 lava flow some 18 or 19 miles from Hilo and about 5,000 feet elevation and waited near where we had seen nene fly over at that time of day in previous years, for nene like to feed in one area and sleep in another miles away.

We were a bit late for the sunset flight; also a heavy mist shrouded the mountains, limiting visibility to a few hundred yards at best. In fact the Hilo watershed was so thickly clouded that Billie had to take our word for it that the forest was there.

Then the omao or Hawaiian thrush (*Phaeornis obscura obscura*) began gurgling their haunting notes, some from near at hand and some from a distance as if to verify my claim. Of course we did not see the doubly obscure thrush, which are hard enough to see in bright sunlight, but their liquid notes spilling into the mist from the phantom forest left an unforgettable impression and made the trip worth while, for we neither saw nor heard the nene.

"Better luck tomorrow," we thought, and the next morning after breakfast we second-gearred our way up the Saddle Road again, this time stopping first by the nene fly-way marker 15 miles from Hilo where last spring the Eastmans and I had seen the akepa and hoped to find creepers.

The weather was still rainy and we were late for the first burst of morning activity as it was all of 9:00 A.M. by the time we reached the spot. Though we saw and heard all the common forest species --- elepaio, apapane, amakihi, iiwi, house finch, ricebird, white-eye, *Leiothrix*, and heard both the Chinese thrush and the Omao ---, we saw none of the rare akepa.

Once Billie and I thought we spotted a creeper. Bob was not convinced; nor later were we after we watched a common amakihi (*chlorodrepanis virens virens*) flit from mamane twigs and blossoms down to the main trunk and larger branches to peck at things there as a creeper would, then up again to the flowers, mewing her cat-like warning call. When is a greenish bird on a tree trunk a creeper and when an amakihi?



Again we parked by the roadside, above the mist belt this time, and watched for nene on a morning flight, but again no luck, though visibility here was excellent.

A stop at the Ronald Walker home at the Pohakuloa Game Reservation gave us the news that the rare palila, which the Pyles also wanted to see, was then at the 11,000 ft. elevation and impossible to reach with our U-drive sedan or for Baby Peter to attempt. Incidentally the adorable Peter took his parents' birding enthusiasm and its disruption of all baby schedules as a matter of course and cheerfully busied himself with moss, little rocks to throw, insects to make jump or fly, and other primitive play things, on all our excursions.

We hurried on down to Puuwaawaa to see crows, had a delightful chat with Mrs. Paris, the wife of the manager of the ranch, revelled in the garden and view, but saw no crows. Our rare bird score still stood at exactly zero and remained there till our return from Kona the next morning when, just as we arrived at the Ranch houses, three crows flew into nearby (600 ft. away) trees in the bull pasture where we had been told not to go.

But we watched them through Bob's excellent binoculars for about half an hour, feeding the young one, preening feathers, and talking to each other, then they flew away and we departed to tour Kona. The weather was sparkling clear and the grounds and view, as always, very beautiful. (Note: Any prospective visitors to the Ranch to see the crows should phone to the manager, William J. Paris, in advance, as we did.)

Late afternoon found us again in the Saddle region between 20 or 21 miles from Hilo watching for nene. Again we watched the shadows of the cindercones on Mauna Kea grow long, the clouds turn rose and golden in another of the unforgettable Saddle sunsets, the omao sing their evensong, and even heard a few plover whistle as they went shoreward for the night. But still we neither saw nor heard the nene.

Instead we saw another "rare bird," one which many have found almost as hard to find as the wild nene, so vast is the area he must cover in his working days --- David Woodside, the wildlife biologist. From him we learned that we were really on a wild goose chase. Nobody so far as he knew had seen the nene use the flyway this year. He had been away himself for some time, so had not been able to make personal observations. Apparently the big birds were going somewhere else this year. But we had a nice friendly chat with Dave.

So the Pyles did not get to see the wild nene. The pay-off came on Sept. 6 when my husband and I went up to Pohakuloa for a sunset picnic and after dark dropped in on the Walkers. Mrs. Walker gleefully told us that she had seen three wild nene between Pohakuloa and Humuula early one evening, but that daily searching had not showed them up again. The game management folks hoped to catch some to bring new blood to the tame flock, and were still trying to find them again.

In closing, I may add that though August and September are definitely poor months to see forest birds or migrants in accessible areas on Hawaii Island, Pohakuloa is at its best. The game bird population is thickest just before the hunting season opens. Nights are not so cold as in the winter and spring, though the temperature drops to the 40's each night. Sunrise and sunset at this elevation between 6,000 and 7,000 feet above the sea, are magnificent. Make reservations and payments for the use of the cottage for overnight stay in advance at the office of the Division of Forestry on Kilauea Ave. in Hilo. Charge is \$2.00 per person per night. Bring plenty of food and warm clothing; the rest is furnished. Ask the Al Stoops how they liked it.



CHRISTMAS ISLAND  
By Gerald Lathbury

I visited Christmas Island between 9th and 12th of September, 1958. During that period I had time to visit the small islands -- Cook and Motu Tabu; to walk along the beach between the camp and the Air Field; and to spend two-hours driving around the central lagoon area south of the Airfield and S.W. of the Bay of Wrecks. My observations are therefore limited to this small area and short periods of time.

I refer to the list of birds observed on Christmas Island in 1953 by Joseph E. King.

Christmas Shearwater - Abundant. Nesting on Motu Tabu where young were seen.

Phoenix Petrel - Abundant. Nesting on Motu Tabu where young were seen.

White-Throated Storm Petrel - Not observed. A local observer reported one seen and probably breeding on Cook Island.

Red-Tailed Tropic Bird - Abundant. Breeding on main and small islands. Mostly with young. A considerable number were recently destroyed by local Gilbertese who crossed to Motu Tabu during the absence of the District Officer. However this is unlikely to be repeated and the stock is rapidly building up.

Red-Footed Booby - Very few seen and only on main island.

Blue-Faced Booby - Common. One found breeding with single chick in centre of island.

Brown Booby - Appeared quite common.

Frigate Bird - Abundant. I was told by reliable observer that there was a large colony breeding about two miles south of Air Field. I certainly saw a number of birds flying over this area.

Sooty Tern - Abundant. One colony breeding with half-fledged young on Cook Island. It was reported that a very large colony had recently bred south of main island.

Crested Tern - Less than two dozen observed. Mostly on Motu Tabu, and a few birds which appeared to be first year birds on Cook Island.

Common Noddy - Common but not abundant. No sign of breeding.

Blue-Gray Noddy - Abundant on small islands, particularly on Cook where I saw birds which appeared to be immature. Otherwise no sign of breeding.

White-Capped Noddy - Abundant, particularly on small islands. Breeding on Motu Tabu and Cook with eggs and young.

Grey-Backed or Spectacled Tern - One seen on main island at close quarters.

Pacific Golden Plover - A few seen on main island.

Bristle-Thighed Curlew - Only three seen: one on lagoon main island and two on Cook.

Turnstone - Not observed.

Sanderling - Not observed.



Wandering Tattler - Abundant. Chiefly on lagoon between Camp and airfield.

Warbler - Not observed.

No Ducks observed.

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Ed. Note: Members who made the Kalena trip in September will remember Gen. Lathbury, of the British Army, as a keen and enthusiastic birder, who was then on his way home from Christmas Island, and who kindly consented to report on the birds seen in that area.

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#### BOOK REVIEW

Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia -- Robert E. Stewart and Chandler S. Robbins. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958. (North American Fauna, No. 62). 69 maps, 401 p. \$1.75.

This is an unusual kind of regional handbook. Written by two wildlife biologists of the Branch of Wildlife Research, Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, it gives a detailed and complete picture of where and when one can find the birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia. No descriptions of species are given; it is assumed that this will be used by those who have access to the usual handbooks.

Introductory chapters contain a brief history of ornithological study in Maryland, a short, but excellent discussion of the problems of conserving birdlife in the face of increasing land use, destruction of habitat, water pollution and the use of insecticides, and a description of the general geographic distribution of birds in Maryland. The area discussed is divided into three biotic regions, based on type of forest, and further subdivided into sections showing secondary differences. Birds breeding in each region are listed. Temperature and precipitation ranges, and growing season are also given for each area.

Most of the book is given over to the 333 species of the region (including 4 extinct and 3 introduced). The authors have used information gathered by themselves in field work since 1941, and from painstaking compilations of many thousands of records of others. For birds accounted as other than accidental or rare, full information is shown on habitat, migration dates, maximum counts, nesting season, breeding population densities, banding records, and maximum counts. Maps show ranges of many species.

It would seem that this book ought to be very useful, not only to those in Maryland and the District of Columbia, but to other eastern sections with similar biotic regions. Certainly it is to be hoped that its publication will result in similar detailed studies in other areas.

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#### FIELD NOTES:

Field Trip, October 12, 1958, to Waianu Trail.

Though the rain clouds were overhead and threatened to come dancing by at an instant provocation, the leader, Frank Stephenson, and 14 others were very fortunate to spend the day without getting wet.

Our first interesting observation of bird behavior was at the Library of Hawaii. Brazilian cardinals were singing and chatting very gregariously; then suddenly we noticed that four of them were actually fighting either for the possession of food or for the defense of territory, but before we were able to determine the causes of their behavior they were frightened away by the passing cars.



At about 7:20 we headed for the Waihole Valley. As we drove toward Pali the birds, the wind, the water and the whiff of white and yellow gingers all enhanced the omnipresence of the enchantment of the tropical wilderness.

Since as we drove farther in, the road from the Poi Factory to the trail got progressively wetter, we decided to park the cars at the trout farm. Even before we had a chance to get completely out of the cars, we noticed African snails crawling on the fence, trees, and road. They were everywhere. Too bad Hawaii does not have some of the predatory and scavenger birds to feed on these snails so as to maintain a balanced ecology. It is frightening to see the damages done by the snails, but nature is so generous that she provides enough food for all. The birds were sharing the guava with the snails. The white-eyes were busily flitting from one tree to another, whereas the ricebirds were playing seesaw while feeding at the very tip of the grass blades.

As we left the jeep road and entered the trail proper, we immediately saw elepaio. About half a dozen of them were calling and feeding. Everyone of us had a very good look at both the mature and immature birds. All along the trail we heard leiothrix, but were unable really to see them. Somehow the birds congregated at the beginning of the trail where the guava was plentiful, so as we went deeper into the valley we saw and heard fewer birds; but the beauty of the trees and the serenity of the hillsides compensated for the quietness.

Even while feeding white-eyes are usually actively flying around, but on this day some of us were privileged to witness a very touching scene. Two white-eyes were softly cooing and quietly preening each other. They sat in a koa tree for quite some time oblivious to everything except each other.

Apapane and bush warbler may be among the birds we heard, but until further verification they must remain on the questionable list. On our return trip the only birds we heard or saw were the Chinese and the barred doves and the linnet.

We were back at the cars by 2:00 o'clock and reluctantly left the slumbering valley behind and headed for Honolulu.

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Unoyo Kojima

## NOVEMBER ACTIVITIES:

FIELD TRIPS: CHUCK HANSON WILL LEAD NOVEMBER TRIPS.

November 9 - To Puuloa Rifle Range. Shore birds should be here in abundance; and we sometimes find unusual migrants in this area.

November 23 - To Poamoho. The melaleuca trees promise an early flowering this year, which should mean wonderful birding.

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

MEETING: November 17 - At the Aquarium auditorium at 7:30 p.m.  
Al Stoops will show his pictures of the bird life of Moku Manu. A real treat is in store for us.

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