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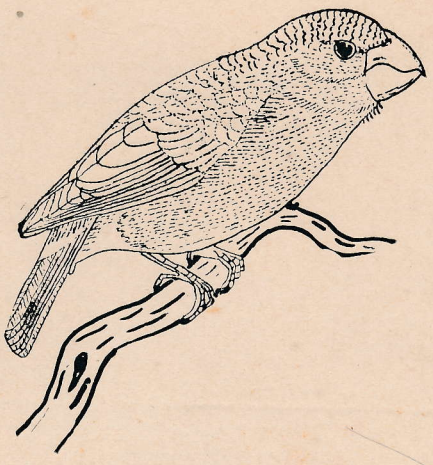

The Orange Koa Finch,
Rhodacanthis palmeri.
See page 22.

BIRDS OF HAWAII
and
Adventures in Bird Study
The Christmas Island Shearwater
by George C. Munro

The Christmas Island Shearwater (Puffinus nativitatus) is an all black bird of the order of Petrels about 14½ inches long.

On May20, 1891 as the Rothschild expedition approached Nihoa this bird was seen but was exceeded in numbers on the wing by the wedge-tailed Shearwater and Bulwer's Petrel. As no landing was made on the island the proportions ashore were not observed.

The first specimens taken by the expedition were collected June 4 and 5, 1891 on a little sand island of the French Frigate Shoal. But at Laysan it was most numerous coming at evening in great numbers and "filling the air with its groans". There, June 16 to 27, its eggs were nearly hatched. In fact one little chick "a ball of black down" was seen on June 17. The eggs are white, one only in a nest on the surface of the ground under the shelter of grass bunches. On Lisiansky it was less numerous and on Eastern Island of Midway a few were seen. Walter Donaghho in May 1941 found it present on both islands of Midway.

This species had not been reported from the main group till I collected a specimen on Moku Manu on August 20, 1937. There were several amongst some large rocks at the top of the western island. On June 20, 1939 there were two at the same place and the adult was banded. A chick in the down was too small to band. On October 3, 1940 a precarious landing was made on the island, rewarded by the banding of a downy chick taken in the recess of the rock at the side of the pass leading to the top. An adult at the old location was also banded and released. This establishes the species as inhabiting the main group of Hawaii.

It would almost seem as if the laying time of some of the birds on

Laysan Island coincides with a food supply suitable for their young. For instance the Bonin Island Petrel in June 1891 had already raised their chicks and nearly all, both old and young, had left the island. The chicks of the Christmas Island Shearwater were just hatching out of the eggs and the Wedge-tailed Shearwaters were laying. Due to such a sequence there would not be at one time more than one species of that particular size and kind of bird with a horde of nearly full grown voracious young to feed.

On islands where the young are taken for food this species stands little chance of survival as its egg is laid and the young reared on the surface of the ground. Their only protection is a bunch of grass or low vegetation. I have been told of their almost total extermination due to these conditions on an island to the south.

On some islands defense works are destroying many birds and this species will also be a sufferer from its nesting places being covered up. This is deplorable but necessary. Where it is a choice of saving human life against the lives of birds, the birds must go. It is impossible to have landing fields for airplanes on flat sand islands with numbers of large birds charging in from the sea. These birds are not used to obstacles in the way when landing on low sand islands and if an obstacle is erected they are apt to strike it with great force. We had to be very careful in the evening on Laysan in 1891 as there was real danger of being struck by a landing albatross. Many albatrosses and petrels were killed on Laysan when the buildings were first erected for the guano workers. When we were there several years afterwards we often in the evening found birds lying stunned on the ground and some dead, from striking the buildings. For this reason I am opposed to tree planting on low islands that are bird sanctuaries, such as Laysan. Heavy birds have for generations been coming in from

the sea without meeting any obstruction in the way. Consequently when these are erected they are unprepared for them and when they strike they are stunned or killed by the impact.

I think all buildings and other obstacles erected by guano workers should be removed when an island is abandoned. Tanks and cisterns should be filled or covered so that the birds cannot get into them. If left open large numbers of birds blunder into them and cannot get out. In 1924 I saw many birds starving to death in abandoned brick tanks on Baker Island. They were mostly boobies but one Pacific Golden Plover was amongst them. The tank was about seven feet deep and the same in diameter. Most sea birds must take a run or flap against the wind to rise in the air from the ground. The golden plover, though a land bird, could not rise perpendicularly to escape.

The Japanese plume collectors on Laysan Island were blamed (by circumstantial evidence) and called "sanguinary pirates" for starving the fat off albatrosses in an abandoned cistern. They were breaking a law of course, which they probably knew nothing about. These poor laborers were no more sanguinary than many of our own people who kill numbers of birds and animals for commercial purposes; this of course is commercial enterprise. It is the parties who sent them there that are to blame. The birds no doubt blundered into the cisterns themselves and could not escape.

We should make our offshore islands as attractive as possible to the birds so that more will join those coming here and eventually they may increase to the same extent that the wedge-tailed shearwaters and noddies have done on Manana, where there were none forty years ago.

Moku Manu and other idlands off the coast of Oahu have come under the Navy. I have every confidence, however, that Rear Admiral Claude C. Bloch who is in command of this Naval District will take an interest in keeping these islands as bird sanctuaries and if possible avoid using them for any Naval purpose.

June 24, 1941

Genus Coturnix Bonnaterre (1791)

57. Coturnix coturnix japonica Temminck and Schlegel (1849) (Coturnix vulgaris japonica T.&S.) — Painted or Chinese quail. Introduced from the Orient in 1921; established on Mauai and Lanai. Breeds in Sakhalin and Japan; winyers to southern China, Siam, Indochina, Formosa and Hainan

58. Coturnix pectoralis Gould (1837) — Pectoral or Eastern stubble quail. Introduced. Native of Australia and Tasmania.

Genus Excalfactoria Bonaparte (1856)

59. Excalfactoria chinensis chinensis (Linnaeus) (Tetrao chinensis Linnaeus, 1766) — King, Painted or Button quail. Introduced from Orient, 1910, to Kauai, later to other islands; established on Kauai. Native of southeastern Asia.

Genus Rollulus Bonnaterre (1791)

60. Rollulus roulroul (Scopoli) (Phasianus Roulroul Scopoli 1786) — Red-crested wood partridge. Introduced from Singapore, 1924, to Oahu; not established. Native of Siam, Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Borneo.

Genus Gennaeus Wagler (1832)

61. Gennaeus nycthemerus (Linnaeus) (Phasianus nycthemerus Linnaeus 1758.) — Silver pheasant. Introduced 1865, 1870 and recently; not yet known to be established, although possibly on Kauai and Oahu. Native in mountains of southern China and eastern Tonkin.

Genus Gallus Brisson (1760)

62. Gallus gallus gallus (Linnaeus) (Phasianus Gallus Linnaeus 1758) — Chicken, aboriginal Hawaiian fowl. Found on Kauai; rare on Lanai and Hawaii; probably extinct on Maui, Molokai and Oahu. Native of S.E. Asia; widespread in Polynesia, possibly by migrating Polynesians.

Genus Phasianus Linnaeus (1758)

63. Phasianus colchicus mongolicus J.F.Brandt. (Phasianus mongolicus Brandt 1844) — Mongolian pheasant, kolohala. Introduced several times since 1865. Native of Russian and Chinese Turkestan.

64. Phasianus colchicus torquatus Gmelin (1789) — Chinese or ringneck pheasant. First introduced about 1865; well established on all main islands. Native of eastern Asia, S. Siberia to region of Canton.

65. Phasianus colchicus versicolor Vieillot. (Phasianus versicolor Vieillot 1825.) — Japanese, blue, green or versicolor pheasant. First introduced prior to 1900; established on Oahu, Maui, Kahoolawe and Hawaii. Native of the mountains of Japan. Hybridized with Phasianus colchicus torquatus.

Genus Syrmaticus Wagler (1832)

Subgenus Graphophasianus Reichenbach (1853)

66. Syrmaticus soemmerringii (Temminck) (Phasianus soemmerringii Temminck 1830.) — Copper pheasant. Introduced 1907-1914; liberated on Kauai, Oahu, Mauai; believed to have interbred with Phasianus colchicus torquatus. Native of Japan.

Genus Chrysolophus J.E.Gray (1834)

67. Chrysolophus pictus (Linnaeus) (Phasianus pictus Linnaeus 1758) — Golden pheasant. First introduced 1865; not known to be established; recent liberations on Oahu, 1932. Native of western China and eastern Tibet.

68. Chrysolophus amherstiae (Leadbeater) (Phasianus Amherstiae Leadbeater 1829.) — Lady Amherst pheasant. Imported 1931 and liberated on Oahu, 1932; not known to be established. Native of western China and eastern Tibet.

Genus Pavo Linnaeus (1758)

69. Pavo cristatus Linnaeus (1758) — Pea fowl. First introduced in 1860; common on parts of Kauai, Niihau and Hawaii; persist on Oahu, Maui, Molokai and Lanai. Native of India and Ceylon.

Family NUMIDIDAE, Guinea fowl.

Genus Numida Linnaeus (1766)

70. Numida meleagris galeata Pallas (Numida galeata Pallas 1767) — Guines fowl. Liberated on various islands since 1874, from domesticated stock. Native of western Africa.

Family MELEAGRIDIDAE, Turkeys.

Genus Meleagris Linnaeus (1758)

71. Meleagris gallopavo gallopavo Linnaeus (Meleagris Gallopavo Linnaeus 1758) — Turkey. First introduced about 1815; escaped from domestication; common on Hawaii, also found on Oahu, Maui, Lanai and Kahoolawe; probably not established on Kauai and Molokai. Native of Mexico.

Order GRUIFORMES

Suborder TURNICES

Family TURNUCUDAE, Bustard-quails.

Genus Turnix Bonnaterre (1791)

72. Turnix varia varia (Latham) (Perdix varia Latham 1901) — Painted quail. Introduced from Australia, 1928; perhaps established on Maui. Native of southern Australia and Tasmania.

Suborder GRUES

Superfamily GPUOIDEA

Family GRUIDAE, Cranes

Subfamily Gruinae

Genus Grus Pallas (1766)

73. Grus canadensis canadensis (Linnaeus) (Ardea canadensis Linnaeus 1758) — Little brown crane. Chance migrant or escape from captivity; not established. Native of eastern Siberia and N.W. North America, south to Mexico.

Superfamily RALLOIDEA

Family RALLIDAE, Rails, gallinules, coots.

Genus Porzanula Frohawk (1892)

74. Porzanula palmeri Frohawk (1892) — Laysan Island rail, Laysan crake. Endemic (and probably extinct) on Laysan Island, established on Midway Islands.

Genus Pennula Dole (1878)

75. Pennula millsi Dole (Rallus ecaudotus King 1784 not R. ecaudatus Miller 1783) (Pennula millei Dole 1878) — Moho, Sandwich rail. Hawaii; extinct.

BIRDS OF HAWAII

Rhodacanthis palmeri

By George C. Munro

The members of the Walter Rothschild bird collecting expedition in September and October, 1891, had many thrilling experiences among the native birds that swarmed in the forests of Kona, Hawaii, at that time. The greatest of these was the discovery of Rhodacanthis palmeri, Orange Koa Finch, as Henshaw named it.

This bird was discovered by H. C. Palmer, Rothschild's collector, at an elevation of about 4,500 feet in the forest of Kona, near Puulehua, on September 28, 1891, on the Greenwell ranch, where we were camped at the time. He shot one from a group of three that were together in a large koa tree. It was a female, light greenish-brown above, and lighter, tinged with yellow beneath; bill and legs bluish-gray. It measured 8 5/8 inches in length. Its stomach contained some greenish seeds or beans. These afterwards proved to be the green beans of the koa tree. Two days afterwards, searching in the same place, I saw a bird hanging back downwards, pecking at something. When killed it proved to be one of the same species as Palmer's bird. Palmer secured another with a golden head and neck and light yellow breast. It was a smaller bird and Rothschild described it as a different species. Another male had a fine reddish golden head and most of its body washed with the same color.

Rhodacanthis varies much in size and color. The largest we measured was nine inches in length, and the smallest 7 1/8. There were several intermediate stages in size and between the colors described. I feel sure that Rothschild was wrong in describing the specimens as of two species.

Rothschild named it after Palmer, its discoverer. So far as we could find, no one knew anything of the bird or that it existed at all. The golden sheen on its feathers fades out after death, and cabinet specimens do not show the real beauty of the living bird. It is the largest of the heavy-beaked Drepanids, and among the most beautiful of the forest birds of Hawaii. It has a musical whistling call which floods the surrounding woods and is difficult to trace to the bird.

After once finding it, it proved fairly common. Perkins, who collected after us, found it still more numerous. He said, "....certainly some hundreds were examined, with the naked eye and with glasses..." "... called as many as seven adult males and two females into one large tree at the same time." This could not be called a rare bird. Yet Henshaw, a few years afterwards, failed to find it. This bird, with the oo and others, had practically disappeared in the meantime. Henshaw found the Kona forest a very poor collecting ground and to us it had been a perfect paradise for this work.

When we collected Rhodacanthis it was feeding largely on the green koa beans. From the appearance of old pods on the ground and the first sight I had of the bird, it evidently hung onto the pod with its feet, hanging back downwards. It then tore open a hole opposite each bean and extracted the seed. Sometimes it cut up the green pod and swallowed all of it. Its strong and sharp cutting beak was fitted for this and its exceptionally large stomach for holding this bulky material. It also had fed to some extent on smaller seeds and I shot one that was feeding with others on the seed of the aalii tree. Quite a rustling sound was made while extracting the seeds from their dry covering. Perkins found it feeding at times largely on caterpillers, also.

It is doubtful if any individuals of this fine species remain alive today.