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Hawaii Audubon Society



For the Better Protection
of Wildlife in Hawaii

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FIELD NOTES IN HAWAII

By Ben King¹

My first contact with Hawaiian birds came in January 1960. The ship's schedule allowed me little time for birding then, and thus I had to be satisfied with the birds of the Honolulu area and some of the seabirds on the way to Japan. About 4 miles (all sea mileages nautical) outside Pearl Harbor, I saw a scattered flock of about 300 Red-footed Boobies on January 13th. Earlier that day about 60 miles south-southeast of Oahu I had encountered several flocks of Common Noddies with which were 4 of the smaller White-capped (Hawaiian) Noddies. Later that week we left for Japan and as we moved westward I saw: both Black-footed and Laysan Albatrosses; a single Bonin Petrel; a few Brown, 2 Blue-footed, and more Red-footed Boobies; 1 Great Frigate Bird; flocks of Noddy and Sooty Terns; 3 White Terns; and numerous Pomarine Jaegers. There were not many birds present on this leg of the journey as our course took us too far south of the islands of the western chain.

The cruise took us eventually to Australia and we returned to Hawaii in May via the South Pacific. Approximately 100 miles southwest of Pearl Harbor I saw 2 Manx (Newell's race) Shearwaters on May 26th. Several hours later I saw 2 more Manx Shearwaters about 70 miles southwest of Pearl Harbor. These White bellied Shearwaters are easily identified by their nearly black back and rapid wing beat. At 60 miles southwest of Oahu a Bulwer's Petrel flew right beneath the bow offering me an excellent view of its wedge-shaped tail. The remainder of the trip to Pearl was marked with the commoner species.

The following day, as we started for California, several hundred Sooty and Noddy Terns accompanied us for the first 35 miles. Around 200 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, including 3 of the dark form, passed by during this period. Thirty miles from Oahu, a Hawaiian Petrel (*Pterodroma phaeopygia*) flew alongside a few minutes. The white underparts, brown upperparts contrasting with black flight feathers, and the large black patches around the eyes set against the white cheeks and forehead distinguished it immediately from the shearwaters and other petrels. In this 2 day brush with Hawaiian sea birds I also saw 1 White-tailed and 3 Red-tailed Tropic Birds, Red-footed and Brown Boobies, several Great Frigate Birds and the ubiquitous Black-footed Albatrosses.

My third trip to Hawaii offered me my first chance to see the native land birds. After our arrival on February 25, 1961, I called Miss Grenville Hatch who gave me some directions for birding on the island of Hawaii. That afternoon I flew to Hawaii

¹The author is an ensign in the U.S. Navy, attached to USS Helena.

and met the Robert Baldwins in Hilo. They showed me the Black Brant that was lingering there and gave me further directions. I rented a car and drove to Hawaii National Park. There I contacted William Dunmire, the park naturalist who has just published a guide to the birds of the park. He outlined the areas I should check for the best results.

On the morning of the 27th I birded the Thurston Lava Tube area and found its abundant Apapanes, common Amakihis, and my first Omao. The Halemaumau crater netted 8 White-tailed Tropic Birds for the list. After lunch I took a trail about a mile into the tree fern jungle from Wright Road. There I found numerous the Leiothrix, White-eye, Apapane, and Elepaio. I also noted 10 more Hawaiian Thrushes. Deep in this jungle I found the first of the rarer birds I was to see, the Akiapolaau. Except for its creeper habits and remarkable bill it looked just like an Amakihi. I watched it as close as 20 feet as it crept slowly along the branches, stopping here and there to pound at the bark with its beak open. As he did this and as he sang his loud, pretty, bunting-like song; the short, straight lower mandible and the longer, much more slender, highly decurved upper mandible were plainly visible. I watched the bird for 25 minutes and then marked the trail to assist in its further observation. Fortunately part of this area, where the OU is also found, now belongs to Hawaii National Park and is to be preserved in its primeval state. Late that afternoon, William Dunmire and I hiked on the lava slopes of Mauna Loa where we very luckily saw 2 Nenes fly low over our heads.

The following morning, February 28th, as I stood on the south rim lookout of Kilauea-iki, a large falcon flew into the crater from the south. As it flew by and then around the crater, I saw the slate-gray back, light underparts, and the bold black sideburns against the white cheeks and throat which identify the Peregrine Falcon. This is apparently the first record of this species for the Hawaiian Islands. From the northwest Kilauea-iki lookout several hours later, as I watched the Peregrine shuttling swiftly back and forth above the edge of the crater, I saw a Hawaiian Hawk dart up from a perch and make a pass at it. The buteo came within a foot of the falcon, giving an excellent contrast of shapes, and then soared off to the south. I brought Dunmire back to the scene 20 minutes later, but by then both birds were gone.

Hoping to see the Hawaiian Duck, I checked the ponds around Hilo that afternoon. I saw 1 Pintail, 5 Shovellers, 12 Scaup (too far away to determine the species) and 15 Baldpates. Accompanying 2 of the Shovellers and a few Baldpates was a smaller, teal shaped duck with a brown breast, a reddish brown head with a bold white stripe running from over the eye to the back of the head, a dark brown rump and back, and long black and white scapulars draped over the upper half of the white sides. This was a Garganey Teal from Eurasia, the first for the Hawaiian Islands. After watching it awhile, I called the Baldwins and was able to show them this surprising find. Shortly afterward I flew back to Oahu.

On February 28th, the ship headed for the Kaula area. Enroute I saw Black-footed Albatrosses, 25 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, Red-footed and Brown Boobies, a Great Frigate Bird, Sooty and Noddy Terns, 1 Red-tailed and 2 White-tailed Tropic Birds, and 30 Pomarine Jaegers. We passed close to the avian beehive that is Kaula on March 1st. The swarm of birds perching and flying above the cliffs included many Red-footed and some Brown Boobies; hundreds of Sooty, lesser numbers of Noddy and a few White Terns, and dozens of Great Frigate Birds. A dozen Gray-backed Terns and one of the very small Blue-gray Terns flew by the ship as did 2 Laysan and some Black-footed Albatrosses, Pomarine Jaegers, 8 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, 1 White-tailed and 2 Red-tailed Tropic Birds. I saw one all dark Shearwater, but it was too far away for identification. A communications watch deep in the bowels of the ship prevented any further observation.

My last weekend in the islands started with a flight to Kauai on the morning of March 3rd. I rented a car there, and set out for the Kokee area. Enroute I got off

the main road and found a pair of Hawaiian Ducks on a farm pond. At Kokee I asked the ranger where Dr. Frank Richardson had done his work on birds the previous summer. He gave me a map and warned me not to try the road without a jeep and not to hike the trail without a guide. The road was barely passable in the Vauxhall and the trail into the Alakai Swamp fairly well marked but often difficult to traverse because of some swampy areas and the trees lying on it. I followed the campground 10 road to its terminus, parked the car and took the trail leading east. It very soon crosses the Mohihi River and then winds its way up onto a high bluff. I reached the swamp in 3 hours. On the way to the swamp I heard the Hawaiian Fowl several times and saw frequently the drab Kauai Elepaio, Amakihi, Iiwi, White-eye, Apapane, and the little yellow Anianiau. I saw the Hwa-mei twice and heard it 3 or 4 times.

I was in the swamp only a short time when I saw the first of 24 Akepas (11 on the 3rd, 13 on the 4th - several possibly seen both days). The Akepa is easily identified by its yellow underparts, green back, small light-colored triangular bill, and the black lores separating the yellow cap and throat giving a somewhat masked appearance. Soon afterward I spotted a brown-backed, white-bellied Kauai Creeper as it worked the trunks of the trees. I saw 4 Creepers that afternoon and 8 the next day. About 5 o'clock, I noticed a bird with a greenish back, yellow breast and dirty white belly. It was similar to an Amakihi but was somewhat larger and chunkier. Its actions were different also. It moved sluggishly along the branches. Close observation revealed a highly decurved (almost to a right angle) bill about twice the length of the Amakihi's. The slender upper mandible was much longer than the lower and it sang a short, sweet trill. This was the Kauai Nukupuu, one of Kauai's rarest birds. I saw another one a half hour later.

I spent that night in a sleeping bag in the swamp. The combination of nearly incessant rain and soggy ground necessitates a waterproof bag. Mine was partially so. In the morning I hiked farther into this mountain top swamp. After an hour's walk the trail led down into a lush, green river valley. Shortly after starting down, a small thrush hopped onto a bare branch about 20 feet away and just looked at me as I watched it. Its very light-pink legs and small size made it the rare Small Kauai Thrush. It soon tired of the binocular's cold stare and flew to another tree and disappeared. A little farther down the trail a somewhat chunky bird lit on a treetop perch and sang a pretty, rather lengthy, finch-like warble. My first view through the binoculars offered nothing but the rain drops and fog on the lenses. But the bird waited while I wiped them off. The second look through the glasses revealed the OU of the green back, dirty white underparts and the yellow head with the large, parrotlike beak. This was the last of Kauai's rare birds that I found. I missed the OO and the Akialoa, but perhaps a return trip will add those two. The Alakai Swamp is the last stand of several of the world's rarest birds and from that aspect alone, a prime object for preservation in its natural state. It would be a shame for Hawaii to add these species to its already extensive list of extinct birds. Kauai still has all its native birds; everything possible should be done to preserve them as an integral part of Hawaii's fascinating avifauna.

The hike back to the road from the river valley took about 5 hours. As I returned through the swamp the commoner species were: Elepaio, White-eye, Apapane, Iiwi, Amakihi, Akepa, Kauai Creeper, and the Anianiau.

Before leaving the island I drove around some and at a grassy pond about 5 miles west of Keheha on Highway 50, I found 10 Hawaiian Stilts and a pair of Hawaiian Ducks. Later, at a pond near Lihue airport I saw another pair of Hawaiian Ducks and a female Greater Scaup. I saw the Scaup at close range, both swimming and flying, which revealed the larger bill, white wing stripe extending onto the primaries and the more rounded head. With these ducks my birding adventure on Kauai and in the Hawaiian Islands was ended. I hope that I shall someday be able to repeat it.

PACIFIC COAST AUDUBON SOCIETIES CONFERENCE

Your President reports:

At the April meeting a brief statement was made concerning the conference at Asilomar, at the end of March, but I should like to set down a longer report for everyone. The conference was marvelously managed by the Pacific Coast Branch of the National Audubon Society, and that means Mr. William L. Goodall and his assistants. Everything went along as smooth as cream, lectures and reports and movies and photograph exhibits and entertainments. The only thing that went wrong was the weather on the last day, superbly sunny, but the wind was too strong for going out to see the sea birds; the storm warnings stayed up. The host society, Monterey Peninsula Audubon Society, did a marvelous job of managing too. I don't know who managed the food; it was delicious, and no one could hope to reduce!

You saw the conspectus some time ago. The Alaskan contingent was most popular and told fine tales of the excellent work in conservation by a young society; their pictures made you long to go.

Mrs. Eric Reynolds had a beautiful movie and Dr. Roger Tory Peterson's "Wild Life in America" was up to his very high standard. His latest "Western Bird Guide" with Hawaii included made its appearance at the meeting, air-lifted for the occasion. Without complaint Dr. Peterson autographed some 600 or more copies!

The Point Lobos excursion was a highlight. Cormorants and murrelets were there in abundance, a pair of oyster-catchers were seen on the way, a pair of pelicans came into sight, and a few seals lay on the rocks, as relaxed as the birds were active.

Mr. Carl Buchheister and his assistant, Mr. Charles Callison, as well as Dr. Peterson, were eagerly interested in news of Hawaiian bird life and the progress (?) of conservation here. I am hoping that they will come to see us some time. Dr. Peterson asked particularly about the Alakai Swamp proposal for a sanctuary. I wish I could have given him good news.

All honor was paid to Hawaii in this Alaska/Hawaii conference. Many stopped me to ask questions or send messages to friends. Our orchids were a great hit. They were in two vases in the main meeting room; after the conference they went to a hospital.

It was a wonderfully friendly group of people, of all ages and all degrees of birdsmanship (word just coined!). The convention was a really joyous experience for me. I hope more of us can participate in future occasions of this sort.

I want to thank the two anonymous friends for helping me pay my way.

Margaret Titcomb

NATURE CONSERVANCY AND PAIKO LAGOON

Most of you do not know that the Nature Conservancy, of Washington, D.C., has been doing all they can to help us procure Paiko lagoon for a Nature Sanctuary. They have written to Governor Quinn, and had assurances of his interest from him; they have written to me encouragingly, hoping they may help us further. At present there seems to be nothing to do but wait until the present jam of legislative activity is cleared, and all involved can see daylight again. I have been in touch with the Harbor Board, the State Planning Office, the Attorney General's Office, and the Governor's Office. The wait should not be long now, and if success comes we shall be happy. Then we must try to find out at once what is the next stage of endeavor.

It is a great pleasure to announce that Dr. Charles Lamoureux has been appointed Hawaiian representative of the Nature Conservancy.

A note in the "Nature Conservancy News," for March tells its readers that "Hawaii Audubon Fights for Paiko Lagoon."

Margaret Titcomb

NOTES

Mr. Ray Kramer says that the Dyal thrush has taken up residence along Manoa Stream.

Frank Richardson's first report on his last summer's work appeared in the Condor, 63:179-180, 1961: "Records of the Rarer Native Forest Birds of Kauai, Hawaii," by Frank Richardson and John Bowles.

You heard about the Navy's use of Kaula Island, north of Kauai, as a bombing target. The reply to the Kauai Board of Supervisors was printed in the Honolulu Advertiser, May 11th. Briefly, the reply to our society was the same: the island has been so used for nine years, it is the only place that is fit for such a target, and the Navy here and in Washington sees no reason to cease fire. It is a wonder that there are any birds left after nine years of bombing. It must be that for them too it is difficult to find another target! Do you suppose the birds hope that the interlopers will finally get out?

At our last meeting we had a chance to see the fine air view photo that Robert Wenkam took for us of Paiko lagoon. It is a beautiful photo and is especially helpful in delineating the point of land that stretches out on the southern side of the lagoon. Again many thanks, Mr. Wenkam.

Margaret Titcomb

FIELD TRIPS:

On April 9, 1961, the Hawaii Audubon Society held its monthly field trip led by Mr. Frank Stephenson. The original destination scheduled for Pa Lehua was cancelled due to rainy weather, and a series of shorter trips was substituted.

The group of seven members and three visitors made its first stop at the alfalfa field near Ewa. Several golden plovers and skylarks were seen, as well as a flock of fifty or more ricebirds. Pheasants were heard calling, but not seen, and occasional Brazilian cardinals and barred doves were seen in the area.

From the alfalfa field the group continued on to the Makua Ranch to look for cattle egrets. None were seen, however, although one black-crowned night heron and several mynahs were seen near the cattle.

With the hope of finding the Bonaparte gulls still at Salt Lake the group made this area their next stop. The population of the lake had changed considerably in the two week period since I had been there last - not only were the Bonaparte gulls not to be found but the duck population had all but disappeared. Only two female pin-tails among approximately 600 coots were found on the lake. White-eyes were seen and a mockingbird was heard along the dirt road approaching the lake.

After a short stop for a refreshing cup of coffee, we all continued on to Sand Island. Barred and Chinese spotted doves were seen in the area, as well as approximately ten jaegers diving and circling a short distance from shore. The jaegers were in all color phases from dark to light and appeared to be feeding on the sewage discharged into the ocean from the Sand Island disposal site.

At the last stop, Paiko Lagoon, a most interesting bird awaited us. Approximately one week earlier an unusual tern, tentatively identified as a Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*),¹ was seen in the area. It was banded with an aluminum band on its right leg. The tern was usually seen perched on an exposed mud flat in company with shorebirds. In addition to the tern, approximately fifty Hawaiian stilts, golden plovers, ruddy turnstones, sanderlings and a pair of black-crowned night herons were seen in the lagoon.

David W. Lupton

¹David's tentative identification was verified by the band. The bird was an immature Common Tern, banded by Dr. F. E. Ludwig, June 27, 1960, at Grassy Isle, Lake Huron, Michigan. The bird was shot on April 27, 1961, by the Board of Agriculture and Conservation.

Kealia Trip - Sunday, May 14, 1961. (Pupukea Trip)

After meeting at 7 a.m., and after a wait for possible latecomers, the group was found to be vice-presidential: Al Labrecque and Mac Johnson; and as showers appeared to be general and relatively heavy over the Koolau Range, the objective was changed to Kealia.

A short trip to the Old Pali Road produced 2 shamas singing, the usual singing leiothrix, 3 coots at the upper reservoir, the large and small doves, and revealed the great beauty of that part of Nuuanu Valley.

The Kealia trail in the Northern Waianae was this day a warm sunny one. The low, dry area at the start, largely of haole koa, revealed 3 pairs of cardinals singing and flying about, also over: 4 brazilian cardinals, 5 mynahs, 5 spotted doves, 5 barred doves, and several linnets and ricebirds. The mid-level zone, of steep rocky slope (almost a cliff) and the higher slopes, with a more varied vegetation, including Grevillia, and black wattle, (*Acacia decurrens*) both in flower, provided a tropic bird, several leiothrix, linnets, spotted doves, a peacock calling, many white-eyes, several ricebirds, and striking low pukiaue shrubs in full fruit - dense masses of fruit: pure white, deep red, pink, or other shades of red (each color on a different plant but the plants close to one another, strongly implying genetic variability of a single species) a remarkable and beautiful Hawaiian plant species.

The upper zone, in the vicinity of the cabin, with some koa, a few ohia lehua, and several introduced species (and badly scarred by bulldozing done in preparation for reforestation) revealed 1 apapane singing, over 5 amakihi (singing only, except for 1 call), several leiothrix, many white-eyes, a few linnets, 2 pheasants (1 seen and heard, the other calling), and 2 elepaio. The views toward the sea and toward the rainy north ridges of the Koolaus, seen over the broad valley, were spectacular. A fine cooling and refreshing swim in the surf at trip's end, at a remarkable steep soft sandy beach, with beds of low flowering sand plants on its upper side, but no shore birds at all, gave further impact to the beauty and rewards of this long outdoor Hawaiian day.

H. M. Johnson

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Birds of Norfolk Island, a further note.

The California Quail (*Lophortyx californica*) was introduced from New Zealand (Oliver, W.R.B. New Zealand Birds, 1955). This corrects my statement in The Elepaio, 21(10), 1961. The English Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) is in Norfolk Island, arriving from New Zealand also. The Reef Heron (*Demigretta sacra*) more closely fits the description of the "blue herons" seen by the Southwicks in February; it has a wide

distribution in the South Pacific. Two more birds the Southwicks add to the list are the White-fronted Heron (Notophoxyx novae-hollandiae), observed on April 1st, and the Domestic Pigeon, or Rock Dove (Columba livia).

David Lupton
May, 1961

FIELD NOTES FROM ISLAND OF HAWAII:

It has been almost four years since my wife and I arrived on the Island of Hawaii, and although actively engaged in ornithology all this time, to date, we have neglected to join the Society. Enclosed herewith is payment for my membership for the next year.

Many of our observations are now ancient history but for the record, I might list the more important sightings we have made since July of 1957.

On September 10, 1957, in company with Dave Woodside, a Semi-palmate Plover (Charadrius niaticula semipalmatus) and a Pectoral Sandpiper (Eriola melanotus) were observed with other more common shorebirds along the Kawaihae mudflats. This area is completely filled with coral now as part of the harbor complex and little habitat remains.

During the annual waterfowl census of 1959, a Bonaparte's Gull (Larus philadelphia) and a Ring-billed Gull (Larus delawarensis) were recorded feeding along the seashore in Waipio Valley on January 8th.

On August 28, 1959, a Sanderling (Crocethia alba) was observed on the lawn outside our quarters at Pohakuloa on the Saddle Road (6,500 ft.). This is the only time we have seen this particular specimen since living here, and it stayed only one day.

More recently, (January 10, 1961), while censusing waterfowl at the Honokahau Pond outside Kailua, a Hawaiian Stilt (Himantopus himantopus knudseni) was seen feeding by itself in shallow water. A Black Brant (Branta nigricans) was also recorded mingling with loafing Pintails. Miss Amy Greenwell of Kona wrote me later that she had seen two Hawaiian Stilts at the Napoopoo Pond in August and had reported them to Mr. Monroe. It's exciting to know that these native birds are again being seen on the Big Island. Incidentally, Mrs. Robert Baldwin has been keeping watch over a Black Brant which has been feeding alongside the highway on Hilo Bay for the past few months.

A rare sighting of a Garganey Teal (Anas querquedula) was first brought to our attention by Bill Dunmire, who was conducting a visitor from Asia by the Nakagawa Pond in Hilo. Dave Woodside and I later checked it out against Dave's Japanese bird texts on March 20, 1961, and agreed as to its identification. As far as can be determined, this is the first record of this bird in Hawaii.

Speaking of Mr. Woodside, I think it only fair that I correct an impression which was made in the article by Mr. Eugene Eisenmann in the Vol. 21 #9, March 1961 issue of Elepaio. Although I am active with the ecological phase of the Nene Restoration Project, it is Mr. Woodside who is in charge. The project is now run almost exclusively with Federal funds, and a separate entity from the County of Hawaii wildlife program.

We are looking forward to receiving our first copy of the Elepaio and joining formally in bird watching on the Big Island.

Ronald L. Walker
District Wildlife Biologist

A hearty welcome to the following new members:

Michael Tomichi, Box 517, Honokaa, Hawaii (Junior member)

Mrs. Elizabeth Hartley, P.O. Box 114, Running Springs, California

Miss Olive Lawson, 419 Summit Avenue, Redlands, California

Mrs. Samuel S. Sewall, Tall Trees, 419 Summit Avenue, Redlands, California

Mrs. Ann Wissler, President, San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society, P.O. Box 3182,
San Bernardino, California

JULY ACTIVITIES:

FIELD TRIP: AL LABRECQUE WILL LEAD THE TRIP.

July 9 - To the booby colony, at Ulupau Head.
Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 8:00 a.m.

PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE IN TIME.

MEETINGS: BOARD - July 10, at 3653 Tantalus Drive, at 7:30 p.m.
Members are always welcome.

GENERAL - July 17, at the Honolulu Aquarium Auditorium at 7:30 p.m.
Dick Davis, President of the Trail and Mountain Club, will give a talk, illustrated with slides, on the trails of Oahu and other islands.

HAWAII AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS:

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