

THE ELEPAIO

*Journal of the
Hawaii Audubon Society*



*For the Better Protection
of Wildlife in Hawaii*

VOLUME 23, NUMBER 1

JULY 1962

TRIP TO ALAKAI SWAMP, EASTER WEEKEND 1962

By W. Michael Ord

At 7:15 a.m. on Friday, April 20th, Mr. William V. Ward and I climbed aboard our Hawaiian Airlines plane to begin our long-planned trip into the Alakai Swamp. The flight to Lihue, Kauai, was uneventful and uninteresting for the most part as it is mainly over the ocean.

Arriving at Lihue our first disappointment came rather earlier in the trip than expected. Several weeks before leaving Honolulu, we had made arrangements to rent a four wheel drive jeep from one of the car rental organizations at Lihue airport. Unfortunately, whoever had rented the jeep before us failed to return it at the specified time. This presented a great setback as a jeep is essential if you intend to drive as far as is possible along the Camp 10 road. In addition, we had made a firm commitment to Mr. G. Swedberg, of the State Fish and Game Department, that we would meet him at Kokee at 10:00 a.m.

After a great deal of discussion and checking around for another jeep without any success, we called Mr. Swedberg who after hearing of our predicament volunteered to pick us up at the airport; so once again we were getting a little nearer to our destination.

The weather was warm and bright but as we began to ascend the mountains, it became cooler with a few light showers. From Kokee, we took the Camp 10 road which is dirt-covered and completely unsuitable for a regular sedan auto as we soon found out. Luckily there had been very little rain and the road was fairly solid. One could not help noticing the blackberry briars in bloom along this road - wherever the native undergrowth has been cleared, the blackberry and lantana are thriving in an astonishing manner.

The arduous part of our journey began at 11:15 a.m. when we reached the end of the road. With our food, camera and recording equipment packed on our backs we began the long hike to the cabin on the Koaie stream which was going to be our base camp. The hike, some 5 miles, was exhausting, not to mention the difficulty encountered where the undergrowth had completely enveloped the trail and where pigs had obliterated the trail with their foraging around. Thanks to Mr. Swedberg and friend, both of whom helped with our packs, we reached our destination at 3:15 p.m. - without their assistance I dread to think where we would have ended up.

The only bird watching done along the trail was when we made one of our frequent stops. Large numbers of Elepaio, Apapane and Iiwi were seen and heard singing overhead in the Ohia trees. There were many other songs heard, but they went unidentified.

After placing our excess baggage in the cabin, Mr. Ward and I began to survey our surroundings, making the most of the remaining light before dusk. Apapane could be heard singing in every direction, though there were numerous other songs which left us quite puzzled. Anianiau were abundant and completely unconcerned by our intrusion.

Sitting on the large boulders in the Koaie stream, we planned our moves for the following day with the emphasis on finding the Kauai Oo. It wasn't long before we saw our first Koloa duck flying up the stream towards us, veering off at the last moment when it detected us. Just before dusk, a second Koloa flew up the stream heading further into the Alakai Swamp.

Our first night in the cabin was one of complete bewilderment. The cabin is located on the bank of the Koaie stream just above a waterfall and all night long we swore we could hear birds singing. On going outside, the only noise was that of the "babbling brook" - no birds singing; but as soon as one lay down again, it seemed as though the birds began to sing once more. The amusing thing was that we casually mentioned it to each other, knowing full well that Apapanes etc. don't sing during the night.

The morning of the 21st was a beautiful clear day though the temperature at 6:00 a.m. was 49 degrees Fahrenheit. Omao were singing from the tops of the Ohia trees across the stream from us, with a great deal of competition from many Apapane and Iiwi. Going down to the stream to wash I was surprised to see a Golden Plover. Particularly interesting because it was in complete winter plumage and all the plovers seen on Oahu and Kauai that weekend had been in full breeding plumage.

After breakfast, we climbed up the ridge south of the cabin, making many stops to record songs and attempt to take photographs. That morning, we identified by sight and song the following birds: Apapane, Iiwi, Elepaio, Omao, Amakihi, Anianiau, White-eye, Chinese thrush, Creeper and Akepa but, unfortunately, we were not so lucky in recording all of them. On several occasions we felt sure that we heard the elusive Oo but each time it turned out to be a new call of the Apapane. (The Apapane has probably more varied calls than all of the other endemic mountain birds. Apapanes, on all of the four islands visited, have their own song variations in addition to the calls which are common to all islands - this makes the Apapane an exasperating bird to identify by song.)

The markings of the Creeper on Kauai were noticeably different from the ones here on Oahu. It is a very drab color - brown above, bill and legs pale grayish brown, pale below with a faint yellowish throat marking. No distinctive markings but the only brownish bird of its size in the Kauai forests. Excluding the Akepa, of which we saw four single birds, the Amakihi seemed to be most scarce and I only recorded seeing six over the entire weekend as against twelve Creepers. By mid-morning, there were very few birds singing so we returned to the cabin for lunch. In order to cover more territory and possibly locate the Oo we decided to split up. Mr. Ward stayed in the valley and I went back up the mountain ridge.

Apapane, by far the most numerous bird in the swamp, seemed to be singing from every available Ohia tree. In the tops of the Ohia trees, some of which were well over 70 feet tall, I again saw Akepa and Creeper. At one vantage point which to me seemed ideal to find an Oo, I tried mimicking its song which Peterson describes in his book of Western Birds - the only results were to entice a Chinese thrush up out of the valley and have an Iiwi imitate me. By mid-afternoon, the clouds began drifting down the valley so I started to hike back to camp before I was enveloped in the Alakai fog which has made many a person lose his way. On reaching the cabin I had counted three White-tailed Tropicbirds winging their way up into the higher reaches of the valley. In the late afternoon, the birds began singing again around the cabin and along the banks of the Koaie stream.

On Sunday, 22nd, we started our return hike around 9:30 a.m. so as to give ourselves plenty of time in case we lost the trail, little realizing at the time that going out would take almost 7 hours as compared to $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours coming in. Our hike out of the Alakai Swamp was in overcast weather which made travelling very much easier. Little serious bird watching was done due to the time limit but we were able to count a large number of White-tailed Tropicbirds in the Waimea Canyon area, and we also heard several wild chickens clucking in the lower canyon.

The only disappointment of the entire trip was that we know we didn't see the Oo and are fairly certain that we did not hear one either; but since the Alakai Swamp is such a vast wilderness we were not too worried as there were many places they could be safe from progress.

DWINDLING NUMBERS OF HAWAIIAN STILT ON OAHU 1962

By W. Michael Ord

By September 1961, it was obvious that the Hawaiian Stilt was heading for a crisis period due to the development of sub-divisions and marinas. Kaelepulu Pond had been one of my favorite places to observe shorebirds, since this area seemed to be a focal point for fall migrants.

After making weekly visits for several months, it was only too apparent that the levelling off and filling in of much of the marshy areas was leading to a smaller flock of stilt. In September 1961, you could guarantee a stilt count of over a hundred birds. In November, the count was down to the fifties and also by this time the water level had been drained down by several feet. This caused the remaining suitable feeding grounds of the stilt to be high and dry. The Christmas bird count for Kaelepulu Pond was two stilt. Now there are none as the remaining water areas are too deep.

KUAPA POND AND PAIKO LAGOON can be covered jointly as the stilt flock here commutes between the two places. Up until January 1962, you could safely say that the stilt were either in Kuapa or Paiko, numbering approximately 80 birds. Due to a great deal of construction at Hawaii Kai and the dredging of a channel to the open ocean across the mouth of Paiko Lagoon, the stilt numbers have decreased to the point where none have been seen at Paiko since late February and none in Kuapa since March. *

KEEHI LAGOON at low tide was another good place for finding stilt. There are extensive mudflats and the small islands have good potential as breeding grounds. Unfortunately, the squatters on these islands have dogs which seem to delight in chasing the stilt. The result - very few stilt have been seen in past weeks.

SALT LAKE had one stilt on the Christmas bird count but none have been observed at this particular location since.

KAHUKU always has been an unpredictable place. After heavy rains, there are a number of suitable marshy areas including flooded fields which are being prepared for sugar cane. Twenty to thirty stilt is an average count but on May 13th John Bowles reported seeing between 50 and 60 birds with the possibility of more in the vicinity. The additional birds are possibly from Kaelepulu or the Kaneohe Marine Base.

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION AT KANEOHE has had a fairly consistent flock of stilt over the past months with an average of 60 - 70 birds. Marine landing craft continually use the marshy areas to get to Kaneohe Bay, but this does not seem to disturb the stilt.

WEST LOCH and near vicinity in the past has always yielded the highest stilt counts with two or three hundred birds being recorded. In the last two months, the highest count has been thirty and a low of three.

Based on counts made prior to September 1961, one can safely say that there were at least 550 stilt on the island of Oahu. On May 13th 1962, we counted approximately 150 stilt. (Due to the difficulty in birding certain areas it was impossible to gain an exact count. Admittedly, this last count was done at the beginning of the stilt

*Late report from Paiko. Two Stilt seen May 20th.
Margaret Titcomb

breeding season, the large flocks have dispersed and the birds are now paired off but a difference of some 400 stilt can hardly be overlooked for this reason since they breed in the same type of terrain that they feed in. The disappearance of the stilt at Kaelepulu, Kuapa, Paiko and Keehi is fairly easily explained away considering the damage done to the feeding grounds and the continual disturbance caused by heavy trucks and other equipment used to level and fill in the marshy areas, not to mention the effect that draining and dredging has had on these same areas. In addition, Kuapa, Paiko and Keehi have been plagued with dogs in recent months. Kahuku and the Marine base are not effected yet so much by development and the resident stilt flocks have increased somewhat. Neither areacould possibly support the missing 400 stilt, individually or together, as I doubt that the feeding grounds at these locations could support such a large number of birds for any long period of time.

West Loch presents us with the most baffling situation. Of all places on Oahu, this one is the largest and most suitable, yet the stilt have still vanished. The building of the new subdivision at Waipahu may be responsible to a certain extent, since the construction approaches the edge of the loch nearest the mangroves which incidentally is also the main feeding area for the stilt. We have had reports from the State Fish and Game wardens that they have seen stilt at the small irrigation ponds in the pineapple fields but always in small numbers.

It is possible that there may be suitable marshy areas which we do not know about but to be able to support as many stilt as we have missing seems incredible.

While I was on Kauai, several weeks ago, I received a report of some 50 stilt being sighted at a pond south of Lihue. Possibly some of our birds are flying to the other islands, a point rather difficult to prove or disprove at this time since so little is known of the concentration on either Kauai or Molokai.

Here I would like to request that our readers, here and on the other islands, notify us of any unusual number of stilt recorded on your respective island.

CATTLE EGRET

On May 9th Paul Breese and I spent a few hours looking for CATTLE EGRET rookeries in the Pearl Harbor region. While we were not successful in this venture, I think that your readers might be interested in the following sightings of cattle egret.

1. Four birds were in a pasture at Waiau next to the Sumida Watercress Farm.
2. Six birds were in a pasture makai of the highway by the new residential subdivision below Waipahu.
3. About sixty birds were with a dozen or so cattle in a holding paddock makai of a "haul-cane" road below the Kahua Ranch Co.'s slaughter house at Honouliuli.
4. Twenty-four birds were feeding in an alfalfa field near Hawaii Meat Co.'s feed-lot operation at Iroquois Point.

Assuming that there are still a few Cattle Egret at Kahuku, at Haleiwa, and in the Koko Head region, the Oahu population must be well over the hundred mark.

A total of fifty-eight have been released on Oahu -- thirty-six in July - August, 1959 and twenty-two in July, 1961. These figures do not include twenty-six released at the Zoo with clipped wings.

None of the birds observed on May 9th were in mating plumage, although we thought that two or three might be starting to get it.

The literature indicates that this is the principal nesting season, so it is not unlikely that the birds we saw were all young birds and that we have an unobserved flock of older mating birds elsewhere on the island.

Alan Thistle, Head
Division of Plant Industry

UNUSUAL FINCH

No one is going to believe me but I saw what I am sure was an adult male yellowish house finch with a thick bill $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch long. It came to my feeding tray twice Saturday afternoon June 16th and stayed about 20 minutes each time. The first time I saw it I thought it was a bird with a stick in its mouth and wondered how the stick got in the feeding tray. A few minutes later I looked at the tray again, and as the bird was still there I stopped to investigate. The lower bill was a little shorter than the upper. The bill looked about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch thick and very heavy for the small bird. There were two small round growths where the bill joined the head - I couldn't see them very clearly. The bird used the bill in a scooping fashion rather than pecking. There were other finches on the tray and in comparison their bills looked stunted! The bird was slimmer than the others, stood its ground well, and ate feverishly but with lots of side glances to be sure all was safe. The second time it came back just as I was describing it to a friend and showing a rough drawing I had made of the bill. We both watched it entranced for about 20 minutes. On Sunday it didn't return while I was watching but early Monday it was on top of the tray. It never seemed to make it to the seed - too many other birds and I guess it needed room to scoop. Unfortunately I had to go to work so can't tell if it ever got any food. I hope it stays around - I'd like to watch it for awhile. The one thing I was not able to do was verify the yellow spot on its back. I think I saw it but my friend never did.

As an anti-climax does anyone care that we saw a white-tailed tropicbird way up in Haiku valley on Sunday June 10th?

Janet Bell

FIELD TRIP to Na La'au, June 10, 1962.

Birds observed at Na La'au, Diamond Head, on Sunday, June 10th, were three mocking-birds, flying and evidently teasing or fighting each other. Many cardinals and mejiro were heard; two cardinal families were seen, many mejiro. Both species of doves were heard and some seen. One Brazilian cardinal was seen at the beginning of the trail. Three nests were observed, probably all deserted. One was that of a mejiro, with one hollow egg in it. English sparrows and mynahs were abundant.

After the botanical walk and brief call on Mr. Munro, Craig Lawrence and I went to check Paiko Lagoon. Tide was high, but most of the bottom of the pond and surrounding areas is so near the surface that fishermen trying to get baitfish or crabs were knee deep only. Three dogs were seen, quite intent on their survey of the area. For what purpose? To chase birds? Walking to the very point of the peninsula, we watched the birds on the mud islets and the far shore. There were six stilts, ten wandering tattlers, the latter very busy indeed looking for food, five ruddy turnstones, two golden plover. Three sanderling suddenly flew above us and out to sea. One immature, brown night-heron flew up from the mangrove area as we passed by. Mynahs were numerous on the far shore.

The stakes indicating the path-to-be of the Kuliouou channel still stand, but no dredging has been done, apparently.

Craig Lawrence
Margaret Titcomb

From: William N. Goodall, Western Representative of the National Audubon Society

We have just completed two important mailings. One to all Audubon members and Magazine subscribers in the West and the other to the Presidents of all Audubon Branches & Affiliates in the West. They concern the following:

1. The 1963 National Audubon Western Conference. A special Flyer announcing this together with a form for requesting priority reservation consideration has gone to all members and magazine subscribers. However, we would appreciate your inserting an article in your Bulletin (before the start of the summer vacation season), to the effect that anyone planning to attend the Conference should get their names on this PRIORITY LIST in order to receive an EARLY OCTOBER mailing of the Official Registration Form. For the past several Conferences we have had to turn people away because they had waited too long before registering. The Conference dates are April 6-7-8-9, 1963 at Asilomar State Park, California and it is open to BOTH Audubon members and friends.
2. We have just advised all Branch and Affiliate Presidents of plans for the 3rd Nature Photography Salon to be held in connection with the 1963 Conference. Copies of Regulations and Conditions of Entry have been sent to the Presidents so that interested members can secure all the details. With summer travel close at hand there is the opportunity to "snap" the very picture that will win one of the three Grand Prizes. The insertion of this information in your Bulletin will enable your membership to plan to participate in this event.

Worlds Fair Visitors Please Note.

I have just received word from the President of the Seattle Audubon Society that they have established their own office headquarters and that it is staffed from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. six days a week.

Anticipating many Audubon members and friends will be travelling to Seattle between April 21 and October 21 to visit the Worlds Fair, they have extended a cordial invitation to be sure to contact their office. They will be pleased to give information and suggestions on field trip areas to visit, books on the natural history of the area, and other pertinent data of interest to Audubonites. They may be contacted as follows:

Seattle Audubon Society
Dr. Claude Heckman, President
820 Joshua Green Building
Fourth Avenue and Pike St.
Seattle 1, Washington

Telephone: MAin 2-6695

May I suggest that you insert the above information in a forthcoming issue of your Bulletin for the information of your membership.

William N. Goodall
Western Representative
National Audubon Society
Office Western Representative
1000 North Durfee Avenue
El Monte, California

Gilbert 8-8378

A hearty welcome to the following new members:

Miss Kay Binder, 4446 Linden Avenue, Long Beach 7, California
 Mrs. Irene Buchanan, 2709 Central Street, Evanston, Illinois
 Mrs. Violet Hansen, Box 15, Volcano, Hawaii
 Aileen M. Ichijo, 3524 Loulu Street, Honolulu 14, Hawaii
 A2C David L. Kaltvedt, AF 1759-6713 Box 53, 1502 Air Terminal Sqdn, Hickam AFB, Hawaii
 Carroll E. Lindley, P.O. Box 577, Kahului, Maui
 Dr. William A. Myers, Straub Clinic, 1000 Ward Avenue, Honolulu, Hawaii

JULY ACTIVITIES:

- July 8 - Field trip to Kahana Bay area, possible site of future Botanical Garden, led by Tom McGuire.
 Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 8:00 a.m.
- July 10 - Board meeting at the Auditorium of the Honolulu Aquarium at 7:30 p.m.
 Members are always welcome.
- July 16 - General meeting at the Auditorium of the Honolulu Aquarium at 7:30 p.m.
 Mike Ord will show his slides of sea and mountain birds of Hawaii.

HAWAII AUDUBON SOCIETY EXECUTIVE BOARD:

| | |
|------------------|----------------------------------|
| President: | Carl C. Simms |
| Vice-Presidents: | John B. Bowles W. Michael Ord |
| Secretary: | Mrs. Laura L. Horigan |
| Treasurer: | Mrs. Blanche A. Pedley |

| | |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Board Members: | Miss Laura A. Draper Miss Margaret Johnson |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|

THE ELEPAIO: EDITORS:

Miss Charlotta Hoskins
 Miss Margaret Newman
 Miss Euphie G.M. Shields

MAILING ADDRESS: P.O. Box 5032, Honolulu 14, Hawaii

DUES: Regular - \$3.00 per annum
 Regular, out of State - \$2.00 per annum
 Junior (18 years and under) - \$1.00 per annum
 Life - \$50.00