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## THE HAWAIIAN STILT -- CONSERVATION BEFORE DESPERATION?

By Hubert Frings

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Conservation-minded individuals often find themselves fighting for causes already almost lost. Repeatedly, in our history, animals and plants that have been abundant become gradually less so, under pressure of civilization, until -- suddenly, it seems -- their very existence is in jeopardy. At this juncture, girding for a last ditch effort, the conservation-minded try to come to the rescue. Unfortunately, in too many cases, it is by then too late.

The question, then, is: what can those who want to preserve interesting and valuable plants and animals do -- before the organisms are vitally endangered?

The Hawaiian Stilt (Himantopus himantopus) affords a case in point. This attractive shore bird seems to be slowly declining in numbers on all the islands. Any major invasion by man of its last remaining refuges could start a sudden and potentially catastrophic decline. Obviously, working now to save some of the regions still suitable for the Stilt is far better than waiting to fight an up-hill battle for one or two marginal areas later, in the faint hope that the birds could survive in them. But how do we go about this effectively?

This question was presented by Margaret Titcomb to the Fauna Committee of the Conservation Council for Hawaii, and was discussed at some length at a meeting in September, 1962. This was shortly after the discovery of rather sizeable groups of Stilt and other shore birds on Kuapa Pond and in a muddy area near Honouliuli, an event that gave heart to those interested in the conservation of Hawaiian shore birds. As a result of this meeting, the Fauna Committee made the following recommendations and summation:

"1. Appropriate member organizations of the Conservation Council (Audubon Society, Trail and Mountain Club, etc.) should compile a list of known feeding and nesting areas of the Stilt, so that potential sanctuaries would be known.

"2. Individuals and organizations, particularly the Audubon Society, should collect data on all activities of Stilts and other shore birds. Little is known for sure about the lives and habits of these birds in Hawaii. The Fish and Game Division needs this to make recommendations for management. The Division receives no funds for non-game bird research, and thus does not have personnel for this work.

"3. Competent persons should gather and review what has been published to correlate with information obtained locally. From the published reports and local data, specific recommendations could be made for conservation.

"4. With specific recommendations, decisions could be taken as to the person or

persons to approach to put these into effect. In some cases, legislative action might be necessary; in others, private owners might be willing to cooperate. In either case, specific suggestions, backed up by solid information, would be needed.

"It is admitted that this is a limited program, not a total answer to the question of how conservation-minded people can protect species before they are critically threatened. Yet, this may be considered as a test case. If means for conserving the feeding and breeding grounds of the Stilt can be found, the way may be indicated for larger programs. While the Fauna Committee, and the Conservation Council as a whole, have broader objectives than the saving of one species of bird, it is by solving single problems that total conservation is ultimately achieved."

E. H. Bryan, Jr., has already used the resources of the Pacific Science Information Center to prepare for the Conservation Committee of the Audubon Society typed copies of published information on the Stilt. This information is still being studied; at the moment, however, we might note that the reports are often discordant, and that there is a general lack of detailed, critical data on this bird, particularly as it is in Hawaii.

Thus, the second recommendation above takes on overwhelming importance at this time. Before anyone can approach legislators, land owners, park boards, or others that have jurisdiction over supposedly good Stilt breeding or feeding territories, he should be able to say, precisely, why the areas whose conservation is being requested are especially suitable, what conservation signifies as far as the Stilt is concerned, and what changes, if any -- in detail -- will be needed.

All members of the Hawaii Audubon Society can help in this effort by recording their observations, checking their records, and passing on the information to the Conservation Committee. As a picture emerges, specific items of information may be needed on specific areas, or explicit details on the life and habits of the Stilt or other shore birds. The accumulation of this information, the essential first step in saving the Stilt, must be done by individuals willing to give time to it. Otherwise, it will not be done at all. Any effort as large as this is always the work of many hands. Those hands are needed now.

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#### FIELD TRIP to Pa Lehua, February 10, 1963.

The Pa Lehua trail was substituted for Poamoho on our February field trip, owing to recent rains. Six members and three visitors participated.

On the Pa Lehua road a dozen mockingbirds, a few house finches, one skylark and one Chinese thrush were seen.

Thin clouds enveloped the summit when we reached there but the sun soon dispersed them. Many trees were blown down by the recent high winds, some of them across the trail that skirts the first puu. There were also landslides here and there.

Elepaio were heard on every side but, contrary to their usual habit, very few showed themselves. There were a few lehua blossoms. Apapane and amakihi were seen among them, as well as flying below the ridge. Half a dozen bush warblers were heard but none were seen.

On the way back we turned off the highway and skirted the shore of West Loch, where we saw four or five night herons but only one or two wandering tattlers, sandelings and plovers.

Next, we visited Waipio peninsula. While we were some distance from the pond that still contains water, about a hundred ducks--pintails and shovelers--took wing,

with our old friend, the white-fronted goose, bringing up the rear. There were some 40 stilts, a flock of 50 turnstones, a dozen plovers, the usual flocks of mannikins, finches and ricebirds. Two green-winged teal and one long-billed dowitcher were seen on the far side of the pond. In the fields across the road from the pond was a scattering of golden plovers, sanderlings and tattlers, with an owl flying above them.

Al Labrecque

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HAWAIIAN DUCK, KOLOA-MAOLI, DUE FOR COMEBACK  
From The Sunday Star-Bulletin & Advertiser  
February 17, 1963

LIHUE, Kauai -- The native Hawaiian duck, koloa-maoli, is due for a comeback.

Funds from a private conservation organization are making possible a Division of Fish and Game restoration project for the birds. They have become rare in recent years, though they once numbered in the tens of thousands.

AUTHORITIES blame the koloa's decline on the introduction of predators, illegal hunting, and the draining of swamps that once provided breeding grounds.

With the reduction of Oahu's Kawainui swamp by flood control projects, most of the remaining koloas are located on Kauai.

In the new project, the Division of Fish and Game will take breeding stock to Hawaii, where the birds will be raised in conjunction with the nene (Hawaiian goose) restoration project.

WHEN ENOUGH birds have been raised, they will be released throughout the Islands.

Hunters and children on Kauai sometimes come across young ducklings and take them home for pets, according to Gerald Swedberg, wildlife biologist.

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SUMMARY OF MINUTES OF HAWAII AUDUBON SOCIETY

A general meeting of the Hawaii Audubon Society was held on February 18, 1963.

Our guest speaker was Dr. Ernst Reese of the Department of Zoology at the University of Hawaii. He spoke on the topic "Methods of Studying Bird Behavior in the Field." The study of ethology which is concerned with the behavior of the intact animal in the field was described. Ethology might also be called the comparative study of animal behavior. The classic experiments of Professors Lorenz, Tinbergen and Baerends were outlined to us. We became acquainted with the meaning of a sign stimulus, imprinting, supernormal stimuli, ritualized and evolutionary behavior, through this delightful talk. Four popular accounts of behavioral studies were recommended to us. These books are in part autobiographies of the founders of the study. The books were: "The Curious Naturalist" and "The Herring Gull's World", both by Tinberger, Konrad Lorenz's "King Solomon's Ring" and "Tales of the Vienna Woods" by Koenig.

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FROM NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY, William N. Goodall, Western Representative:

"... Conservation organizations agree that 'the time is ripe' for us to render meaningful service and information to the man on the street who is avidly seeking guidance about nature's ways, and the wise use of our natural resources. However, it is the individual like yourself, who supports the aims of an organization such as the

National Audubon Society, to whom we must turn for the continuation of programs through which we can add to man's knowledge of the world in which he lives.

"Thus, if each of us in some small measure can contribute and also make known the resources and services of our National Audubon Society, who can predict what another year will achieve in growth and understanding? The time is now, and time is of the essence.

"Meanwhile, we hope to greet many of you at our biennial Western Conference next April. Others we trust will pay a call or write our Conservation Resource Center in Berkeley, to obtain some of the wide variety of Nature and Conservation materials and gifts to meet all ages and interests. Should you reside or visit in Southern California, make it a must to see the Audubon Center in El Monte. Serving 40,000 children and adults yearly, it is one of your Society's most important educational programs.

"It is with keen satisfaction that we can announce to our friends and host of former campers the renewal of the 'Audubon Camp' in the West. Make plans now to trek to western Wyoming next summer and spend two glorious, informative weeks at Trail Lake Ranch in the Wind River Range, just a hop, skip and a jump from two famous National Parks--the Grand Teton and Yellowstone. ..."

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#### APRIL ACTIVITIES:

- April 8 - Board meeting at the Auditorium of the Honolulu Aquarium at 7:30 p.m.  
Members are always welcome.
- April 14 - Field trip to Poamoho, a mountain hike for native birds.  
Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 7:00 a.m.
- April 15 - General meeting at the Auditorium of the Honolulu Aquarium at 7:30 p.m.  
Michio Takata and David Woodside, both of the Fish and Game Division, will show the nene film and talk about the work of their division.

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#### HAWAII AUDUBON SOCIETY EXECUTIVE BOARD:

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