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## THE FOREST'S ONE-MAN BAND

By Creighton Peet

From AMERICAN FORESTS

March 1963

If some student of ornithological psychology wants to fly away with a bundle from some foundation weighted down with too much cash, he should propose an exhaustive study of whether the mockingbird really understands what he is doing.

As everybody knows, the mockingbird is the one-man band of the forest, imitating not only every other bird he hears with extraordinary accuracy, but the barking of dogs, the meowing of cats, the squeaking of fence gates, the creaking of wheelbarrows, etc. Also, most observers are agreed, the mockingbird appears to be enjoying himself immensely while deceiving his neighbors with bogus mating calls, whistling for dogs whose masters are nowhere near, and keeping humans awake all through the bright moonlit nights he prefers for such monkeyshines. A writer in the AUDUBON MAGAZINE recently reported six hours of uninterrupted mockingbird song ending at 9 a.m., and the writer can personally vouch for an eight-hour performance.

The question to be answered by our researchers is whether the "mockbird," as he was first called in a "Natural History of Carolina," published in 1731, is consciously playing tricks, or simply responding to what Peter Ames, assistant curator of birds at New York's Bronx Zoo suggests is "a linking up of connections in the bird's nervous system. Whatever form a bird's thoughts may take," he adds, "they are certainly not based on human experience, human reasoning powers, or the mental states which we call emotions. Certainly birds exhibit outward behavior which we can label in human terms, but moving inside the creature's head one must devise a different idiom to express what is actually going on."

It is pretty well established that the mockingbird's singing--both his native song and his imitations--is an expression of a state of euphoria, or emotional contentment. Under such conditions, an auditory, visual, or hormonal stimulus appears to trigger the playing of that which, to a human, might appear to be a collection of tape recorded sounds. Even sex plays a part, for the mockingbird (chiefly the male) sings mainly during the mating season.

But as sound as this explanation is, it has also been noted that a mockingbird will appear to be thinking over a new song he has just heard, and even try it out very softly to himself before putting it into his repertory and playing it full volume. This brings us back to the question of whether this bird really knows and understands what he is doing,--or is he just a new type of miniaturized tape recorder masquerading in bird's feathers?

Various writers on the mockingbird have given extraordinary reports on his capacity to imitate. One observer reported on a bird which imitated 32 other birds in 10 minutes; another claimed his bird gave 87 different calls in 7 minutes. And in the Boston

Arboretum there was the case of a mockingbird which imitated 39 bird songs and 50 bird calls, as well as a frog and cricket.

The mockingbird (*Mimus polyglotus*, or "many-tongued mimic") is found only in our hemisphere, in the U.S. chiefly in the southeastern states, and in California, rarely in New England. It is a member of the family Mimidae and is related to catbirds, thrashers, etc. About the size of a robin (9-11 inches long) it has never won any prizes for beauty. It is a dull gray, but has white feathers in its long, floppy tail, and flash patches on its black wings. In flight, these wings have been described as "stroking the air like the oars of an old rowboat."

Mockingbirds run a tight nest, which is a strictly utilitarian affair built of twigs (or even bits of wire if utility men have left any about) and lined with some soft material such as fresh grass. However, mockers have been seen to dive repeatedly onto the backs of unhappy dogs, coming away with clumps of fur for use in nests. These nests are low, usually not above 20 feet from the ground, and often near human habitations--probably to make eavesdropping easier. These birds like town life, and have been seen sitting on curbs and even running through traffic.

Observers have reported that a pair of hardworking mockingbirds will raise a family of from 3-6 fledglings in from 26 to 30 days, from the time the first nest twig is put in place to the permanent departure of the last small bird. The eggs are a dull greenish-blue with brownish spots. When the male bird thinks it time to build a nest, he seizes a twig and flies from bush to bush, or runs up and down a branch with it, until the female gets the idea. This is a lot cheaper than perfume, long distance phone calls, or expensive dates.

People's reactions to mockingbirds have varied considerably. Audubon once wrote that "they should be listened to only amid the magnolias of Louisiana." He also noted they seemed at home "in the moon-drenched old city of Charleston." However, since mockers are inordinately fond of grapes, oranges, figs, etc., some growers have taken a different view, and it is recorded that in 1862 a grape grower got so mad at the mockingbirds around St. Augustine, Florida, that he killed 11,000 of them, burying the remains at the roots of his grape vines in revenge. For protein, these birds eat ants, beetles, grasshoppers, boll weevils, bees, wasps, etc.

It should also be noted that the mockingbird is the state bird of Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas, which proves he still has plenty of friends despite all the racket he makes.

Until not too many years ago people kept mockingbirds in cages in their homes as often as canaries, but today it is against the law to cage most American song birds. However, Mexican or South American mockingbirds, which are nearly identical, are sometimes found in pet shops.

Mockingbirds are pugnacious, truculent and aggressive, and zoos have found they usually cannot keep them in aviaries with other birds, as they will kill them. Strict believers in private property, they will tolerate no socialist nonsense of sharing a yard with another mockingbird couple. They even carry their aggressions to the point of attacking their own images reflected in mirrors and the brightwork and hubcaps of cars. Some bird lovers shroud their hubcaps when parking in driveways, to keep birds from destroying themselves. On occasion, 6-8 birds have been seen in a vicious free-for-all. Mockingbirds take delight in dive-bombing dogs, cats and snakes, pecking them severely.

This brings us to what some ornithologists refer to as a "courtship dance," but which others see as a sort of truculent, chip-on-the-wing daring of an outsider to intrude on one's territory or "turf" as it is known in teenage gang circles. One couple's area is said to run from 20,000 to 60,000 square feet. In the dance, two birds will face each other about a foot apart, and hop up and down and back and forth

in a spectacular display. Very often both birds will be either males, or females, and appear to be dancing on either side of an invisible line drawn on the ground, apparently daring each other to make one false step. Occasionally these displays end in a knock-down, dragout fight.

Probably about the sneakest bit of song pirating of which mockingbirds have been guilty occurred when the Edward Bok Singing Tower near Lake Wales, Florida, imported several cages of nightingales and kept them in the tower for a time to get them used to the area. Long before they were released, however, the local mockingbirds were making like nightingales all through the Florida orange groves, and after a short while the real nightingales were so outraged, they refused to sing at all.

"And the mockingbird is singing all night long."

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LETTER from Walter R. Donagho, March 12, 1963.

I have enclosed a paper on my predictions of the present status of the Hawaiian forest birds that you might find of interest and for publication in the "Elepaio."

From time to time, I have been hearing about new re-discoveries made of Hawaiian birds, such as the Maui Parrot Bill and Crested Honeyeater found by Baldwin on Haleakala, and Dr. Richardson's expedition to Kauai, where he found all the forest birds alive. I have been maintaining, all through the years, that these things would happen, and maintain now that more species are going to be rediscovered.

The paper recounts all of this, island by island, and species by species, and perhaps "Elepaio" readers will be interested in it.

Some day I hope to return to the Islands again, at least for a visit. I miss them from time to time!

I am on my way now to Mexico for about four months....

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A RESUME OF THE "EXTINCT" HAWAIIAN SPECIES, WITH LISTINGS OF SIGHT RECORDS  
AND REPORTS DURING MY SOJOURN IN THE ISLANDS  
By Walter R. Donagho

OAHU

Time may very well disclose a larger number of "extinct" birds still living, than is now realized, if any of the reports I have gotten turn out to be true. There should be at least seven (two more than the five generally considered to be alive) species still alive.

Akialoa

In addition to the observations made by Harold Craddock on the Kipapa Trail, and Mr. Northwood at Palehua can be added that of my mother on Mt. Kaala about 1935. She couldn't identify the bird, but she certainly knew it several years later when she pointed it out in Bryan's "Natural History of the Hawaiian Islands". At that time she was certain of her identification, and said that the bird flitted about her, looking her over as she sat resting on the trail, about halfway up. I remember her trying to describe it to me as a "bird with a very long curved bill" and passed it off as an "amakihi"!

Although very rare, I believe that there are still a few pairs of Akialoa in both ranges.

Akepiuie

I saw one male sitting preening itself on a limb on the Kipapa Trail in 1939. I was certain of my identification, saw it through binoculars long enough to study it thoroughly and to note that it wasn't much larger than the ricebird and was smaller than the amakihi. It was orange with brownish upperparts, and was much duller in color than the Hawaii Akepiuie.

O-o

This bird may still be alive! I think it is. On the Kipapa Trail in 1939, I heard a bird emit a series of loud "ows" that were clearly heard, and had the resemblance of the softer notes of the Kauai O-o, which I had heard two years before. What else could have made those notes? I cannot think of any other species that sounds like what I heard. I suspect O-o only because of its resemblance to the Kauai species, also in the fact that they were quite loud, as in the case with the Molokai and Hawaii species.

I received a report of several "black birds with yellow feathers" seen in the upper Opaiula Gulch one or two years before. Someone else reported a black bird with yellow feathers in the upper Punaluu Valley. I received another report of a bird sitting high in a tree making calls sounding like the bark of a dog. I think the call of the O-o would, to the ear of an untrained observer, sound like a small dog barking.

Oahu Thrush

It may still live. Don Abbott told of hearing a thrushlike "qua" on the Kona-huanui Trail. He had just returned from Hawaii and was quite familiar with this cry, having heard it frequently while there.

I found feathers of a brown bird on the trail up Mt. Kaala in 1938. There were grey contour feathers that matched those of the breasts of other Phaeornises, but the wing feathers were chocolate brown, not olive. However, a description of the Oahu Thrush in Henshaw states: "Wings and back, chocolate brown."

O-u

It may still live, but I have received no reports of observations.

Akiapolaau

It may still be alive, but I have received no reports of observations, except one bird seen by Mr. Northwood on the Poamoho Trail about 1939. He thought that its breast was a bright yellow color, which would satisfy the description of the Akiapolaau.

Mamo

Of all the above, this is the one most likely to be extinct. There haven't been any observations, even during the last century.

KAUAI

Happily reported to be with all species intact by Dr. Richardson. I saw twelve while there in '36 and '41.

MOLOKAI

Of all the islands, this today is the one most likely, along with Lanai, to have suffered the most. Only the Apapane and Amakihi are known to be alive. Woodside found both on Olokui, and thinks he may have seen Iiwi on the Wailau Valley Cliff Trail. The Black Mamo was reported to me by workmen camping in the forests high on Olokui in 1936. They also stated they saw the Kakawahia, or creeper in the upper Pelekunu Valley. I take stock in these reports, as these birds are distinctive, not easily confused with others.

The status of the O-o and Crested Honeyeater are unknown. Munro thought he heard the Olomau singing along the Wailau Crest in 1935.

LANAI

This island is in the saddest shape with respect to its avifauna. Nobody has visited it since Munro in 1936, and he found it sadly depleted. The construction of a road over Lanaihale disturbs me, as well as the birds. This brings civilization right into the heart of the all too narrow forest belt (about fourteen square miles) and, judging from the intolerance of the birds for civilization (It is only in areas well remote from the nearest road that one finds them common.) I fear for their welfare. Lanai's forest birds may already be things of the past.

MAUI

The rediscovery of the Maui Parrot Bill and the Crested Honeyeater high on the NE slopes of Haleakala leaves only two with uncertain status; the Akiapolaau and the

Akepiuie. I see no reason to believe them extinct; nay, I expect that someone will find them at least not rare. They should be in the same area.

This would mean that all of Maui's forest birds are alive!

Then, someone might be able to bring out a specimen of the O-o Henshaw saw on Haleakala. As yet undescribed!

#### HAWAII

My comments on Hawaii are simply that there is still too much ornithologically unexplored forest and a larger area of too insignificantly explored forest for anyone to make any definite statements of the status on the unreported species. This fact has been so ever since the departure of Henshaw and Perkins, who all saw the species unreported today. In their minds, they have not been extinct. Even the O-o and Mamo were not considered extinct. Baldwin, Woodside, Munro and I have been going into the woods since 1936, and have been seeing species that have been considered as extinct.

I have always felt, through all these years, that until we get much more into the woods and have a chance to really explore them, we just cannot know the status of any of the unreported species. We certainly have no right to judge them as "extinct". It is far better to admit that we just don't know, that the species may very well be still alive.

I predict that we are going to find many of the species alive. That more than one will turn up as "not rare".

#### O-o

The O-o may still very well be alive! I predict that one will be shot and brought out, and won't it make the news! I have had too many reports of "black birds with yellow feathers" to doubt that it may still exist. Sometimes the reporter would come right out and say that he saw the O-o or Mamo.

#### Mamo

May still exist. The most reliable report I have had was from Mr. Bill Bryan, who said he saw a mamo on the Kau slopes of Mauna Loa.

#### Orange Koa Finch

I predict Hawaiian Ornithology is in for a surprise. This species will turn up, and may even not be rare. Almost the entire range of this species is unexplored today, from the Volcano to Hualalai, and it needs to be done before any judgement can be made on its status.

I called a female Koa Finch over my head in 1937 in the Koa Forest east of Bird Park, and had an excellent look at it through binoculars. I am certain of what I saw!

#### Ulaaihawane

Status unknown. I think it may still be alive. It has always been rare, and today, it may not be any rarer than it was a hundred years ago. It lives way back in the forest, far away from human habitation. Yet, Mr. Munro stated he thought he saw one on the Upper Hamakua Ditch Trail in '36. And there were the highly ventrilloquistic notes I heard near the cone of Kaala just off the Hamakua Ditch Trail in '37. The bird emitted long, slow "swe-e-ets", usually one, followed by a pause, then repeated two more times. What were they? Of this species? Closest resemblance to the whistled calls of the Orange Koa Finch, but highly unlikely, since the environment was completely foreign to that preferred by Koa Finches (to say nothing of being completely out of range). They were certainly different from anything I had previously heard, and even the exotics on Hawaii at that time had never emitted anything remotely like it.

#### Akialoa

See no reason to believe this bird extinct, even though unreported since Henshaw's days. If the call of the Kauai species is similar to this one, then I heard one near Keanakolu. It will turn up one of these years in this area and in Kona, as well as in other areas.

#### Chloridops Kona

Status unknown, but see no reason why this bird should be considered extinct. It was seen right to the last by Henshaw and Perkins. Since then NOBODY qualified to observe has even been in its range in SW Kona, an area that may very well turn up the

Koa Finch, Akialoa, and the Perkins Creeper.

One will need to strike out from the Kau Trail leading up from Naalehu and follow the slope of Mauna Loa around towards Hualalai at around 5500 feet elevation.

Green Solitaire

Most probably still alive in its limited range, which no one has visited since Henshaw (This fact should speak for itself!).

Chaetoptila

Of all the species on Hawaii, this is one that I could very well say is extinct. It was uncommon long ago, but disappeared by the time Henshaw explored the island, and, of course, hasn't been seen since.

Other problems are the whereabouts of the nesting places of both the Newell's Shearwater and the Hawaiian Storm Petrel.

A good bird survey of the Islands is sorely needed. Someone who will spend the time going into all of the unexplored areas, not once but several times, keeping up with it till all of the "extinct" species are recorded, or till one has some good basis for considering them extinct. The observations made by Baldwin on Hawaii and Maui and Dr. Richardson on Kauai during the last ten years should leave much hope for someone's finding more species still living. They are--let's find them!

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#### GUAM BIRD RECORDS

A bird-watching school teacher, Janice J. Beaty, in Guam has provided a very interesting and informative account of birds she has seen on that western Pacific island, published in Pacific Discovery, 16(2):11-15, 10 photos, March-April 1963, titled: "In Search of Guam's Birds."

Notes are given concerning 19 of the birds recorded as occurring on Guam: the Rufous-fronted Fantail Flycatcher (Rhipidura rufifrons uraniae), Micronesian Broadbill (Myiagra oceanica freycineti), Painted Quail (Coturnix chinensis lineata), Philippine Turtle Dove (Streptopalia bitorquata dusmieri), Marianas Fruit Dove (Ptilinopus roseicapillus), White-throated Ground Dove (Gallicolumba xanthonura), which she says never alights on the ground, Guam Rail (Rallus owstoni), Micronesian Starling (Aplonis opacus guami), Marianas Crow (Corvus kubaryi), Micronesian Kingfisher (Halcyon cinnamomina), Pacific Man-o'-War (Fregata minor), White-tailed Tropic Bird (Phaethon lepturus dorothea), Edible Nest Swiftlets (Collocalia inexpectata bartschi), Reef Herons (Demigretta sacra) in both gray and white phases, Nightingale Reed-warbler (Acrocephalus luscini), Pacific Golden Plover (Pluvialis dominica fulva), Mongolian Dotterel (Charadrius mongolus stegmanni), Gray-tailed Tattler (Heteroscelus brevipes), and Cardinal Heneyeaters (Mysomela cardinalis saffordi). The only two of the land birds not seen were the Micronesian Megapode (Megapodius laperouse) and the Short-eared Owl (Asio flammeus). A real contribution is her noting three species not previously recorded as occurring on Guam. They are: Java Sparrows (Padda oryzivora), a sparrow-like bird tentatively identified as the European Tree Sparrow (Passer montanue), and another weaver finch tentatively identified as the Black-headed Mannikin (Munia atricapilla).

Pacific Discovery is published by the California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco.

(Review by E.H. Bryan, Jr.)

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#### FIELD NOTES:

In the last week of February 1963, David Woodside, Alan Thistle and myself made a trip into the mangrove area at the mauka end of West Loch with the intent of locating the Cattle Egret rookery.

Over the past months, we had observed Cattle Egret flying to and roosting in these tree tops. On this occasion, young Cattle Egrets could be heard calling from within the mangroves as we approached. The main portion of the rookery was located in a very narrow strip of mangroves, utilizing no more than twenty individual trees. Each tree

had between 2-4 nests and most nests had young birds from newly hatched to the flying stage. At a rough guess we estimated approximately 60 nests, which would account for almost the entire adult breeding birds on Oahu.

One point of particular interest to us was the fact that none of the Egrets had their buffish breeding plumes. Most of them had yellow legs and yellow bills with a faint buffish crown marking and were otherwise pure white. Over the last six-month period, the Cattle Egrets had been observed at the old salt beds and at Iroquios Point. None of these birds ever showed any indication of attaining the breeding plumes and only two were observed to have reddish bill and legs but were otherwise white. Based on how far these birds are in their present breeding cycle, we estimated breeding must have started in December 1962, which is about the time that Alan Thistle and I began to notice a decided reduction in Egret numbers at the two named feeding locations.

Unfortunately we are presently unable to understand why our Cattle Egret should breed and not attain the normal breeding plumage and also why they should decide to go to nest in December when in the area where they were caught in Florida they breed in May or June. However, we are sure of one thing, excluding a natural disaster brought on by nature, the Cattle Egret are now firmly established on Oahu.

On the same day, a Great Blue Heron was seen at very close range by all of us in the mangrove area.

W. M. Ord

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FIELD TRIP for Shorebirds, March 10, 1963.

Our field trip this month proved to be a disappointment from a bird-sighting point of view compared with our previous shorebird hike in January.

We resumed our 7:00 a.m. starts this month for two reasons, (a) to observe birds before they became overly disturbed by speedboats and fishermen, etc., and (b) to ascertain the reaction of our group for future early starts when appropriate. The reaction to the latter was an astounding success as we started off with a convoy of eight packed cars.

Kuapa Pond and Paiko Lagoon produced the only unusual shorebird of the day, a Semi-palmated Plover observed at close range feeding on a mudflat at Paiko. Other birds seen were Hawaiian Stilts, Sanderlings, Turnstones, Golden Plovers and Wandering Tattlers. With the continued construction and dredging of Kuapa Pond for the Hawaii Kai development we were extremely lucky to see as many birds as we did. There are still several suitable feeding areas but little chance of any successful breeding by the Stilt this year. Paiko is slowly filling up with silt and will certainly have to be dredged to some extent if it is to remain a suitable feeding ground. The outlook for both of these locations is not too hopeful from our point of view.

Our next stop was Sand Island and Keehi Lagoon. Unfortunately an exceptional low tide had bared many mudflats and birding was almost impossible due to the great distances involved. Several Pomarine Jaegers and Brown Boobies were seen out at sea. The lagoon area had a few Turnstones and Golden Plovers but was otherwise deserted as far as we could see. Once again the Bristle-thighed Curlew, which has been here for the past four months, was not located though it had been seen a few days before.

The salt beds at Waipio Peninsula produced the regular flocks of Black-headed Manikins, Strawberry Finches and a few Ricebirds feeding in the tall seed grasses. Noticeable by their absence on this occasion were the ducks and White-fronted Goose. A brief hike around one side of a sugar cane field to a bluff overlooking the mangroves in West Loch enabled us to see several Cattle Egrets returning to the rookery.

A pleasant surprise at Kahuku--there were approximately 60 stilts and a small flock of ducks, comprised of 4 Shoveler, 2 American Wigeon and 6 Pintail. There was also a flock of Ricebirds wheeling around like a cloud of locusts. They must have numbered well over five hundred birds.

Our last scheduled stop was at Kaneohe Marine Corps Air Station to observe the evening flight of seabirds to Moku Manu. Large numbers of Sooty Terns were seen

circling the island; Brown and Red-footed Boobies appeared to be already nesting on the island. Frigate birds, as usual, were harassing Boobies returning to the colony and forcing them to disgorge their catch. Several Gray-backed Terns could be seen flying off the eastern side of the isle. Only one Brown Noddy was recorded.

Returning over the Pali, a brief stop was made at Kawainui to see several Gallinules and to the Old Pali Road to listen to Shama Thrushes. With a little bit of imitating whistling, the Shammas were easily coaxed into view.

E. M. Ord

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ALOHA to our new members:

Life: Mrs. Mitsuko Kirito, P.O. Box 632, Kekaha, Kauai

Regular: Harry Whitten, 1720 Ala Moana Blvd., Honolulu 15, Hawaii

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MAY ACTIVITIES:

May 12 - Field trip to forest trail if the weather permits. If inclement weather to the ponds to study shore birds, especially the status of the migratory birds.  
Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 7:00 a.m.

May 13 - Board meeting at the Auditorium of the Honolulu Aquarium at 7:30 p.m.  
Members are always welcome.

May 20 - General meeting at the Auditorium of the Honolulu Aquarium at 7:30 p.m.  
Speaker for the evening: Dr. Hubert Frings  
Topic: Pesticides

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