

THE ELEPAIO

Journal of the
Hawaii Audubon Society



For the Better Protection
of Wildlife in Hawaii

VOLUME 23, NUMBER 9

MARCH 1963

BIRDS OF LEHUA ISLAND OFF NIIHAU, HAWAII
By Frank Richardson
University of Washington, Seattle, Washington

It has been 31 years since Caum visited Lehua, a barren 291 acre, 710 feet high crescent a mile off the north end of Niihau, and 16 years since Fisher's visit. I have not learned of any ornithological notes on Lehua since the publications of the above two men (see Caum, E.L. "Notes on the Flora and Fauna of Lehua and Kaula Islands", Bishop Museum Occ. Papers Vol. XI, No. 21, 1936; and Fisher, H.I. "The Avifauna of Niihau Island, Hawaiian Archipelago", Condor, Vol. 53, No. 1, 1951). Since a number of changes seem to have taken place and some new observations were made it seems worthwhile to again publish a report on the island based on a two-day visit I had the opportunity to make on August 10-11, 1960, thanks to the Hawaii Fish and Game Division and their boat the "Makua". I was accompanied by David Woodside, now Director of the Wildlife Branch of the Division, and John Bowles; and other biologists who were, however, more interested in other animals than birds.

Lehua has rarely been visited by biologists, yet it is worthy of ornithological attention for it is unique or of special interest in a number of ways. It is the largest bird island (generally defined as an island with breeding populations of sea birds) in the Hawaiian Archipelago east of Nihoa. It is the most eastern breeding grounds in Hawaii of the Red-tailed Tropic Bird and has a large population of this spectacular species. Surely in some years and perhaps in many it has the largest breeding population of Brown Boobies and very likely of Red-footed Boobies and Hawaiian Terns of any bird island near the main Hawaiian Islands. Lehua's changing populations of sea birds and of introduced land birds afford interesting examples of colonization from the east or west in an intermediate area of the Hawaiian chain.

Twenty-one species of birds have now been recorded for Lehua. I shall list below, with comments, the 13 species we saw, four of them apparently new for the island, and then mention earlier observations of other species.

Wedge-tailed Shearwater or Uau Kani. Puffinus pacificus cuneatus.

Very common as in 1932 and 1947. We estimated at least 1500 present. Eggs and small young.

Bulwer's Petrel. Bulweria bulwerii.

Not recorded on island before. We saw at least four adults with eggs or small young and estimated at least 40 adults present. Eight or more dead adults were found partly eaten apparently by rats.

Red-tailed Tropic Bird or Ula. Phaethon rubricauda rothschildi.

Very common as in past but certainly not the most abundant species as Caum found it. Our estimate was 250 adults. Eggs to large young.

Brown Booby or A. Sula leucogaster plotus.

Caum found this booby not uncommon but Fisher did not see any. We found it rather common: some 120 adults. Eggs to flying young.

Red-footed Booby or A. Sula sula rubripes.

Curiously Caum did not find this species on Lehua but Fisher records 3000 birds. We estimated over 500 adults. Eggs to flying young.

Great Frigate-bird or Iwa. Fregata minor palmerstoni.

We saw some 18 non-breeding adults whereas Caum found several pairs of this species breeding.

Ruddy Turnstone or Akekeke. Arenaria interpres interpres.

Some 20 seen.

Wandering Tattler or Ulili. Heteroscelus incanum.

Two seen.

White-capped Noddy, Hawaiian Tern or Noio. Anous["] minutus melanogenys.

Caum considered this tern rather rare, Fisher saw some 200 and we 350 or more. Eggs to flying young.

Barred Dove. Geopelia striata striata.

Fisher saw a few and we, 6.

House Sparrow. Passer domesticus.

Not recorded heretofore. We saw some 10. Fisher did not find this bird on Niihau but it is on Kauai.

Cardinal. Richmondia cardinalis.

Not recorded heretofore although common on Niihau. One seen (by Woodside).

House Finch. Carpodacus mexicanus.

Not recorded heretofore on Lehua. We saw at least 20. Common on Niihau.

Among the sea birds it is interesting that Fisher visiting Lehua in mid-August observed two each of Christmas Island Shearwaters, White-tailed Tropic Birds, and Sooty Terns, none of which we saw. Caum was the only one of us to see Blue-faced Boobies and Noddy Terns, both nesting, on Lehua. Among land birds the Skylark is the only previously recorded species we did not see. Caum found it rather common and nesting in large cactus (Opuntia) but cactus has now entirely disappeared from Lehua, and perhaps with it, the Skylark. Caum visited Lehua in both April and August but does not give dates of his observations.

There are still a moderate number of rabbits on Lehua (one was likely to see at least three in walking around for an hour or so) but the island is not over-run with them as during Caum's visits. Rats are present, too, attested by one dead one found and their apparent killing of Bulwer's Petrels. In view of this and the undoubted damage by the rabbits to some of Lehua's native plants, eradication of the rats and rabbits seems highly advisable.

Caum obtained some 25 species of flowering plants on Lehua. Collecting just in August we could not judge the existence of some annuals but we did find 19 species of plants which were kindly identified for us by Dr. Charles Lamoureux of the University of Hawaii. Species we found but Caum did not were: the grasses Cenchrus hillebrandianus, and Chloris sp.; Scaevola frutescens, Anagallis arvensis, and Pluchea (probably odorata). The Pluchea was of particular interest for its apparent absence in Caum's time may account of his not finding Red-footed Boobies on the island. The plant is now the only sizable bush on Lehua and is being used almost exclusively by these boobies for their nests. The bushes are few and often broken down or dying so appear to be deter-

mining the size of the breeding population of boobies.

Although Lehua is next to privately-owned Niihau it is State of Hawaii property and could well be added to the group of Bird Reservation Islands now including Moku Manu and Manana. The Coast Guard light on Lehua, which was long operative and occasionally visited, has been inoperative in recent years and even if reactivated it would not interfere with the island's value as a refuge. Surely Lehua's interesting and valuable avifauna, its flora, and the rich and beautiful fauna of its shores and waters readily justify the island's being made a refuge. I hope that this article may give impetus to a strong plea to this end which I made to the Game Division in September of 1960 but on which I have not heard of action taken.

FIELD TRIP to see shore birds, January 13, 1963.

Our bird walk this month was a search for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds. We started from the Honolulu Library with more participants than we had had for a long time. Unfortunately, when we arrived at Sand Island which was our first point of call, one car had been lost in the traffic.

The first sighting of the day was a Pomarine-Jaeger seen with the aid of the telescope flying offshore in search of food. Several other Pomarine Jaegers were seen for a total of eleven. Keeping them company was an immature California Gull. Our search for a Black-footed Albatross was fruitless, due mainly to the lack of ocean going freighters. After gleaming the ocean of all its species present, we turned our attention to the small islands and rock piles which dot the Keehi lagoon area, between Sand Island and the International Airport. We were lucky in the fact that it was high tide and very little of the extensive mudflats were showing. This had the effect of confining the shorebirds in a very limited area, which proved very convenient. Golden Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones and Sanderlings were quite numerous, 30 Stilt were counted and also one Bristle-thighed Curlew. After watching this group of birds for a while, an immature Herring Gull and two immature Ring-billed Gulls joined them on the same mudflat. An immature Glaucous-winged Gull was also recorded in this same area before we moved on to the old salt beds at Loko Hanaloa (peninsula between West and Middle Lochs, Pearl Harbor).

Arriving here we saw a large flock of Ricebirds and Black-headed Mannikins which flew up from the tall grasses bordering the dirt road and alighted in some Haole Koa bushes close by. Several Strawberry Finches were heard and then seen in flight as they flew across the road in front of where we were parked. Driving around the salt beds, Skylarks could be heard singing, not to mention the many small flocks of doves, Mannikins and Ricebirds which flew up before us voicing their disgust at our disturbing them. When we reached the water area, our cavalcade of cars was too much for the some one hundred ducks feeding there. After a clatter of wings, we witnessed a departing duck flight. The majority were Shovelers, some Pintails and a few Green-winged Teals. The White-fronted Goose which was seen the day before was not seen by our group. There were a number of Stilt, Golden Plover, Ruddy Turnstone and Sanderling feeding along the mudflats but no Pectoral or Sharp-tailed Sandpipers which had been observed in this area for the last three months. Cattle Egret and Short-eared Owls were continually flying around the area, at one time 3 Owls could be seen. We were forced to leave there when a police patrolman informed us of a Dove shoot.

Our next stop was at Kahuku; the ponds had almost dried up but we were able to count a dozen Pintail, two Semiplamated Sandpipers and a Semipalmated Plover. The Sandpipers had been seen on a previous bird walk to Kahuku late last year.

The last stop of the day was at Kawainui Swamp, a total of five Gallinules were seen and many more Coots. Two ducks, in the same area, produced some discussion as to their identity but after a little process of elimination we decided that they were

Mallards in eclipse plumage. We had a grand total of 36 species, which excluded all native mountain and sea birds.

W. Michael Ord

Field Note: Aiea Loop Trail, February 3, 1963.

I am writing this field note with mixed feelings. I am happy to report that there is no new sign of horseback riding on the Ewa end of the loop, but along the trail were numerous beer cans and bottles. The lunch spots were littered with plates, spoons, and napkins.

The trail is well marked and offers different types of terrain for hiking. The most difficult job is to educate the public not only to use these facilities wisely but also to preserve the natural beauty.

Farther up on the trail another picnic area is being added for recreational purposes. The trees are being cut to make room for cars, and the underbrush is being cleaned for the picnickers. I hope the Park Board will leave enough cover for the birds, especially for the tit and the shama.

On February 3, I was happily reassured that despite the poor showing for the Christmas count, the birds are still plentiful. Usually the N.A. cardinal is the first bird to be seen, but today was an exception. As I drove into the park area, I heard bird calls from all directions, so I hurriedly tried to park the car, but I suddenly had to stop the car, for a shama was perched on the koa branch over hanging at the parking lot. What a treat! A handsome bird not only singing but also displaying its beautiful feathers.

On the ground were two Brazilian cardinals busily feeding and six mynahs holding a conference. The boy scouts were camping, but the barred doves were nonchalantly feeding around the tents. White-eyes were calling from the very top of the eucalyptus.

Since the recent wind storm had torn many of the eucalyptus branches, the trail was wonderfully scented. I was pleasantly surprised to notice that the damage was limited to leaves and small branches. The birds seemed to be enjoying the sun, especially the amakihi. They were everywhere and were calling from the tree tops. Even the apapane was busy feeding and singing. Of course, the lehua blossoms were attracting the birds. The lehua was just beginning to bloom, and the nectar must have been potent, for the apapane and the amakihi were outsinging each other. Elepaio was also contributing to the music. The warm sun after the rain had produced many insects, and an elepaio had to stop at the middle of his song to snap at a bug flying nearby.

With all this medley of voices I missed the linnet. Have the linnets temporarily left this ironwood area? Where have they gone? I counted only two on December 23 and heard only one today, while previously we always saw and heard two to three dozens feeding and singing in the ironwoods. Let's hope that they'll return after the men are through working in this area.

Since the Waikiki end of the loop still has underbrush to protect them, the introduced birds were numerous in this area. Very close to the beginning of the lower trail there is a thicket of hau, and as usual there were two shama thrushes singing and calling. The leiostrix were also singing and moving around the hau. There were about eight to ten of them in a flock. They kept very close to the ground, but they seemed to be at home. Two of the birds were calling to each other, but unfortunately, they kept themselves very close to the hau and only offered a glimpse of their beautiful colors. In contrast, a N.A. cardinal was perched on the very tip of a dead guava branch and was singing and displaying its brilliant red feathers in the sun.

I hope the Park Board will leave this area untouched, so that the birds will feel safe enough to raise families.

After three hours I realized that I had been too excited to keep an accurate count. The following is an estimated record for the day:

Amakihi - 35, about the same number as that of Christmas count.
 Apapane - 16, much more numerous because of lehua and koa blossoms.
 Brazilian cardinal - 2, none for Christmas count; might have established residence in this area.
 N.A. cardinal - 17, thirteen more than Christmas count; numerous around the picnic area.
 Barred dove - 7, (38 Christmas count); much less because of more picnickers.
 Chinese dove - 2, fluctuates with the time of year.
 Elepaio - 29, seemed to be as numerous as usual.
 Finch - 7, more numerous at the Waikiki end of the loop.
 Leiostrix - 18, always in flocks of 6 to 10.
 Mynah - 7, around the picnic area.
 Ricebird - 2, population changes with the availability of grass seeds.
 Shama thrush - 2, none for Christmas count; very happy to report that they are still here.
 Tit - 2, at the Waikiki end of the loop.
 White-eye - 8, amakihi and apapane were much more boisterous.

Unfortunately the habitat conditions are being changed around the park; so until more permanent ecology is established, the bird population will fluctuate. This trail has potentials of becoming one of the State's best nature study trails.

Unoyo Kojima

Bird Note: At 11 in the morning, Thursday, January 31st.

Brenda Bishop, of the Bishop Museum staff, called attention of those nearby to a flight of twenty-four 'iwa flying south, just above Bishop Museum. We crowded to the windows to see the unusual sight. Some of us remembered that 'iwa that fly over the land do so because of the approach of stormy weather.

Inez Gibson, of the Bishop Museum staff, resident of Lanikai, has often reported flights of 'iwa from over the crest of the Ka-'iwa Ridge, back of Lanikai. Flights of twenty to twenty-five are not unusual and one great flight numbered over a hundred.

The name of the ridge indicates that it is an ancient stronghold of the 'iwa. Can we keep it from the grasp of subdividers?

Margaret Titcomb

SYNOPSIS OF MINUTES OF HAWAII AUDUBON SOCIETY

At the last general meeting held on January 21, the possibility of a weekend field trip to Maui was discussed. Maui had been suggested because the good birding areas such as Kanaha pond and Hosmer Grove are not too far from one another. They are within an area of about 35 miles. Means of transportation and reasonable accommodations were suggested by the members but no decision was reached.

Three films, all made by members of the Society, were shown. Two were old silent films, one on shore birds and the other on forest birds. They both occasioned fond reminiscences. The third movie was the most recent, the sound movie "Birds of Hawaii."

ANNOUNCEMENT: The National Audubon Western Conference will be held at Asilomar, Pacific Grove, California, on April 6-9, 1963. The program subject is: Our Living Heritage - Going Where?

ALOHA to our new members:

Life: Mr. & Mrs. Sam A. Cooke, 1323 Dominis Street, Honolulu 14, Hawaii

Regular: Mrs. Elizabeth K. Bushnell, 3210 Melemele Place, Honolulu 14, Hawaii
 Howard Clarke, 2119 Kaloa Way, Honolulu 14, Hawaii
 Margaret C. English, Volcano P.O., Hawaii
 Mrs. E. A. Grantham, 17 Makalapa Drive, Honolulu 18, Hawaii
 Mrs. Ernest Kai, 222 Dowsett Avenue, Honolulu 17, Hawaii
 Mr. & Mrs. Maurice V. King, 2536 Olopuia Street, Honolulu 14, Hawaii
 Mrs. Walter A. Kohl, 1155 Via Tranquilla, Santa Barbara, California
 W. F. Picher, Box 917, Belvedere, California
 Mrs. Rosalie Spencer, Wakiki Biltmore Hotel, 2424 Kalakaua Avenue, Honolulu 14, Hawaii

Junior: Martha King, 2536 Olopuia Street, Honolulu 14, Hawaii

MARCH ACTIVITIES:

March 10 - to see shore birds. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 7:00 a.m. This early start is necessary in order to visit Kuapa Pond, Sand Island, Waipio Peninsula, Kahuku, and Kaneohe Marine Base to observe the roost-flight of sea birds to Moku Manu.

March 11 - Board meeting at the Auditorium of the Honolulu Aquarium at 7:30 p.m. Members at always welcome.

March 18 - General meeting at the Auditorium of the Honolulu Aquarium at 7:30 p.m. Dr. Philip Ashmole, Ornithologist of Bishop Museum, will talk about his trip to Ascension Island, illustrated by slides. If time permits another short bird film will be shown.

HAWAII AUDUBON SOCIETY EXECUTIVE BOARD:

President:	W. Michael Ord
Vice Presidents:	Miss Margaret Titcomb
	Carl C. Simms
Secretary:	Mrs. Laura L. Horigan
Treasurer:	Mrs. Blanche A. Pedley
Board Members:	Dr. Hubert Frings
	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