

# THE ELEPAIO

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## NATURE NOTES FROM MOLOKAI

By Noah K. Pekelo, Jr.

For over ten years I have observed the resident birds of Molokai, from the misty rainforest on the mountain tops, along the towering sea cliffs and on the sandy beaches besides the azure sea.

Observing birds in their habitat is an avocation which more persons should enjoy, the pleasures gained through bird watching - enjoyed by so few - goes beyond learning about birds, it gives one the chance to see and feel the true essence of nature.

I write this isolated from civilization, on a lonely beach, sunset bathes the earth with soothing rays of scarlet light, rolling breakers crash upon the reef and dash shoreward in ranks of miniature waves which dissipate in a rhythmic lapping on the sparkling sand. In the trees the melodious calling of birds ushers in the night, as I pen the last lines of the resident bird list for Molokai. The list which I include here is presented with a brief summary on the relative numbers and locations on where to find the birds.

### Native Land Birds

Apapane (*Himatione sanguinea*), Common, in the wet and dry Ohia forest areas, the rim of Waikolo valley, Hanalilolilo, Waikolo plateau and the East Molokai Forest Reserve.

Amakihi (*Loxops virens*), Common, localized in Ohia forest along Hanalilolilo, Waikolo plateau, Papaala Pali, and the East Molokai Forest Reserve at Kanupa.

Molokai Creeper (*Loxops maculata*), Rare, in the dense rainforest along Papaala Pali and the Waikolo plateau.

Molokai Thrush (*Phaeornis obscura rutha*), Rare, in the dense rainforest of Central Molokai at Kumueli.

Pueo (*Asio flammeus*), Common, open country about the pineapple fields in Maunaloa, Hoolehua, Kualapuu and in open areas in the Forest Reserve.

### Native Water Birds

Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Common, coastal fishponds, marshes and estuaries, large streams in mountains and valleys, Palaau and Kaunakakai mud flats, Halawa, Wailau and Pelekunu Valleys.

Gallinule (*Gallinula chloropus*), Common, but localized in brackish fishponds at Ooia, Kaluaapuhi and Honomuni ponds on Molokai.

American Coot (*Fulica americana*), Abundant, in the brackish fishponds at Palaaau, Kawela, and in the streams at Halawa and Waialua valleys.

Hawaiian Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*), Rare, only 13 birds on the Island at Ooia and Kaluaapuhi fishponds in Palaaau.

White-capped Noddy (*Anous minutus*), Common, but localized, along the windward sea cliffs, at Ilio point and Kahinaakalani small colonies of these birds can be observed.

White-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon lepturus*), Common, deep valleys of Pelekunu and Waikolo, and also along the windward sea cliffs.

#### Introduced Birds

Mynah (*Acridotheres tristis*), Abundant, throughout the Island in the low and mid elevations, especially about cultivated fields and residential areas.

White-eye (*Zosterops palpirobosus*), Abundant, in all elevations a serious pest in fruit orchards on Molokai.

North American Cardinal (*Richmondia cardinalis*), Common, in the low and mid elevations.

Brazilian Cardinal (*Paroaria cucullata*), Scarce and localized, 15 birds were counted at Kawaikiu in West Molokai during 1963. These birds apparently are migrants from Oahu.

House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*), Abundant, from low areas to open sections of the wet rainforest throughout Molokai.

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), Abundant, about the cultivated fields and residential areas.

Ricebird (*Munia nitoria*), Abundant, in the low and mid elevations especially about the fields planted with species of Panicum grasses.

Red-billed Leiothrix (*Leiothrix lutea*), Abundant, in mid and high elevations throughout the Island.

Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottus*), Abundant, in the mid and low elevations, especially about residential districts and cultivated fields.

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), Common, but localized in the open fields and grazed pastures of Maunaloa, Hoolehua and Kalae.

#### Introduced Game Birds

Lace-necked Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*), Common, open areas and cultivated fields throughout the Island.

Barred Dove (*Geopelia striata*), Abundant, throughout the lowlands, very high densities occur in the Palaaau area.

California Quail (*Lophortyx californicus*), Abundant, throughout the lowlands high densities occur in Central and West Molokai along the shoreline.

Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*), Common, throughout all elevations except the rainforest.

Green Pheasant (*Phasianus versicolor*), Scarce, and localized open forest and pastures in the mid elevations at Kainalu, Moanui and Keopukaloa in East Molokai.

Coturnix (*Coturnix coturnix*), Common, and localized in the grassy flats and pastures in the mid elevations at Maunaloa, Hoolehua and Kalae, also in the East Molokai area.

Rock Dove (*Columba livia*), Common, but localized in the open pastures and the cultivated fields at Hoolehua, Puu Kaa, Moku, and Kaunakakai gulch.

Chukar (*Alectoris graeca*), Common, but localized in the open and rocky pastures and along the wind swept cliffs at Moku, Ilio point and Puu Nana.

#### Recently Introduced Birds

Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), Multiplying rapidly in the lowland areas at Palaau, Punakou, Kalamaula and West Molokai.

Reeves Pheasant (*Symaticus reevesi*), Localized, some reproduction in the open forest at Kainalu, Mapulehu, Kamoku and Kaunakakai (above 2,000 ft.).

Indian Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*), Multiplying rapidly throughout the mid and low elevations at Palaau, Kalamaula, Kaunakakai, Kamalo and Halawa valley.

Indian Black Francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*), Multiplying rapidly, in the lowlands about cultivated fields, in the middle elevations at Kalae, Punakou, Kalamaula, Kaunakakai, Kainalu and Keopukaloa.

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba scopolii*), Introduced on Molokai by the Dept. of Agriculture released in the Palaau area, present status unknown.

Indian Sand Grouse (*Pterocles exustus hindustan*), Released on Molokai by Div. of Fish & Game, present status unknown.

Erckels Francolin (*Francolinus erckelii erckelii*), Released on Molokai by the Div. of Fish & Game, present status unknown.

Barbary Partridge (*Alectoris barbara barbara*), Released on Molokai by the Div. of Fish & Game, present status unknown.

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#### REPORT ON A RECENT FIELD TRIP TO THE ALAKAI WILDERNESS RESERVE By Ronald L. Walker

On February 21, 22 and 23, W.M. Ord, Warren King of the Smithsonian Institute, Dr. Andrew Berger of the University of Hawaii and myself journeyed to Kauai for an expedition into the Alakai Swamp. We had auspicious weather at the outset, and visibility was excellent as we peered into the Waimea Canyon. White-tailed Tropicbirds were common there, as were Apapane along the Kokee road. From the lodge at the park we attempted to take pictures of the Jungle Fowl, which were frequenting the woods behind the building, without too much success. The birds were in excellent plumage and fairly uniform in appearance, despite the intermixture with domestic chickens as known to have occurred here.

We left the truck at the end of the road and had to wade through thick patches of blackberry, but eventually emerged into more or less native forest. We could hear Apapane and Iiwi calling in increasing numbers as we went further into the forest, and

were also able to pick out the songs of Anianiau and Akepa. We arrived at the Koaie cabin late in the afternoon, with just enough time to make one sortie up and over the ridge into "Ooaa valley" (This was where Ord and Ashmole found Oo last September.) We expected more activity than we found, but we did see numerous Elepaio, Creeper, Iiwi, Apapane and occasionally an Amakihi. Just before dark we saw a Golden Plover roosting on the rocks in the Koaie stream.

The next day as we made our way up the pali, we heard a call which at first sounded like an Iiwi, but was more subdued and melodious. We could almost imagine that it sounded like the "whip-poor-will" quoted by Richardson in the Peterson's guide. I did catch a glance of a large dark bird flashing white and flying off through the ohia, but we heard the call no more. This was not a positive identification, but it is possible that it was the Ooaa. For the remainder of our time in the Wilderness we mimicked this call in an effort to coax the creature out into the open.

We again descended into the valley, and spent many silent minutes awaiting the appearance of the Oo, but were rewarded only with the sight of the more common birds. We did see two Elepaio chasing each other, which may or may not have been an indication of the approaching of the mating season, and on another occasion a single Elepaio with nesting material in its bill was noted in flight.

Back up on the ridge we plunged deeper and deeper into the swamp, birding as we went along. We heard and then saw two Ou in a tall Ohia directly over our heads and watched them for several minutes. (On our return along the same trail later, I saw a bright male with grass in its finch-like bill at about the same point, which may have been from the same pair.) Periodically the beautiful melodious song of the Omao brightened our day, and from time to time we were able to get fleeting glances of the bird. Anianiau and Creepers were by far the most common birds next to the Apapane and Iiwi, and we saw several Akepa. Our president's educated ear picked up the tune of a Cardinal and the Chinese Thrush, and a few White-eye and Linnets were noted. It was a pleasure to be in an area where introduced birds were a minority group. Then the rains came and we returned to the cabin, wet.

On Sunday we had only a few hours to spare before trekking out, and made one more attempt to find the Ooaa. We heard several calls which were most likely this bird's, but we were again disappointed in not seeing one. As we were descending into the valley, we caught sight of two small Kauai thrushes working in the lower branches of a tree. They were relatively tame and made no sound, as we watched. Back at camp Dr. Berger reported finding two active nests, one of an Anianiau and the other of an Iiwi. As we stared at the nest site of the former, we noticed a pair of Amakihi about 18 feet up in an Ohia engaging in courtship feeding activities, and soon afterwards we saw them mating. We had apparently arrived in the area at the beginning of the nesting season for most of these birds.

Our trip out was uneventful and rainy. We saw no Koloa on the stream courses, but did see some on the ponds near the town of Koloa and on the reservoir on the road to the airport.

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#### NESTING STATUS OF SEA BIRDS ON MOKU MANU

By W. M. Ord

On Saturday, March 7, 1964, a group of friends and myself set out for Moku Manu under what I would normally call adverse conditions for such a trip. The wind was blowing hard, it was overcast, and there was a lot of white caps breaking in Kaneohe Bay, so you can imagine what it was like once we got out of the Bay's shelter.

I think the only reason that we kept going was because three of the group had



never been out to the island before. One was a visitor from Australia, and this was his only chance.

As we proceeded out over the bay, it was evident that this was going to be a trip to remember. Each swell we hit sent a huge spray over the boat, and before long we were all soaking wet. Going through the reef into the open ocean was probably the worst experience that I have ever gone through. We were following a large sampan, and it was bobbing around like a cork, and then we started hitting the really big swells. It is a peculiar feeling to be on the sea and at the same time be able to see Moku Manu in the distance and Oahu behind you, when all of a sudden the only thing you see is an ocean swell towering above you in front and the tail end of one that you have just gone over in behind. Many a time I felt sure that this was it, as the small boat rose over one swell after another to find nothing but a big drop to the water, and each time the boat came down with a crack that was enough to tear it in half.

Once we got in the shelter of Moku Manu the ocean was a little smoother, so we dropped anchor and sat in the boat debating whether or not to swim ashore. Our minds were soon made up for us by the boat bobbing around on the swell--we all started feeling a little uncomfortable and decided that no matter what happened we had to get onto solid ground again. Getting onto Moku Manu can be tricky in rough water--as you have to go in on the crest of a wave and catch a hold of the island before the water runs back, and then you clamber up the rock. Our first member misjudged his landing and had a horrible time getting out, the second was not too much better, though he was saved from too much discomfort by the fellow who had landed first. The other three of us landed without incident.

Sooty Terns were screaming overhead by the thousands. Hawaiian Noddies were sitting at the entrance to their nesting sites on the cliff face. As we moved around the base of the island to the eastern side which slopes gently upwards, we disturbed a Wandering Tattler. On the slope, we counted about a dozen Gray-backed Terns some of which were sitting on eggs. The entire island was covered by Sooty Terns incubating and in many instances with young, some of which had feathers coming through on the wings. There were a few Common Noddy Terns sitting on eggs, but a very small number compared with what was there last August. Both the Red-footed and Brown Boobies were sitting on eggs--no evidence of any hatchings as yet. Only eight Frigate Birds were seen. Two Masked Boobies' nests were found; both of which had eggs. No Shearwaters or Petrels were seen on this trip, though the following weekend, ten Wedge-tailed Shearwaters were seen on the island.

The return trip to Kaneohe was uneventful except for more of what we had gone through on the way out to the island. Taking everything into consideration it was well worth the effort spent.

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Field Trip to Ulupau Head, March 8, 1964.

The Society met at the Library of Hawaii on Punchbowl Street under much pleasanter weather conditions than we have had for the past two months. The sun was shining and the strong cold winds that we had been having seemed to have blown themselves out.

It was an extremely large group that began the journey over the Pali, some 26 members and guest had turned out. Our first stop was at the ponds on the Old Pali Road. On February 9th, our field trip had made this point its first calling place and found a family of Gallinules feeding on the pond's edge--this trip we were also fortunate in finding the Gallinules feeding in the lily pads close to the road, though one young was missing from the previous month's count. Red-billed Leiothrix and other exotics could be heard singing in the forest nearby but did not show themselves.

On arriving at the Marine Base, we bundled into as few cars as possible, and then followed our escort up to the Red-footed Booby colony on Ulupau Head. The

weather was still being very kind to us with hardly a cloud in the sky.

There must have been at least five hundred pairs of Red-footed Boobies nesting on the Base in the "Haole Koa"--some had eggs and other were still in the process of nest building. No young birds were seen in any of the nests. As we watched the birds, it was interesting to see that whilst some Boobies went far a field to gather nesting material, others would resort to stealing from a neighbour's nest, while the other bird was absent. One very noticeable thing this year was the number of dark phase Boobies nesting in the colony.

Sooty Terns were continually flying overhead to Moku Manu where there was a lot of bird activity. Through the telescope one could see literally thousands of Sooty Terns, flying over and sitting on the island. There were also a good number of Red-footed Boobies and Brown Boobies, a few Common Noddies and an occasional Hawaiian Noddy. Some of the luckier birders were able to pick up a Gray-backed Tern now and again. Noticeably lacking were the Frigate Birds of which only three were counted. No Tropicbirds or Shearwaters were seen.

W. M. Ord

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ALOHA to our new member:

Mrs. Kathleen A. Armstrong, 1020 10th Avenue, Honolulu, Hawaii, 96816

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#### APRIL ACTIVITIES:

- April 12 - Field trip to Poamoho Trail. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 7:00 a.m. (PLEASE NOTE TIME) Leader: Mike Ord, 587-328.
- April 13 - Board meeting at the Auditorium of the Honolulu Aquarium at 7:30 p.m. Members are always welcome.
- April 20 - General meeting at the Auditorium of the Honolulu Aquarium at 7:30 p.m. Program for the night: Ernest G. Holt will give a slide show of the "Scenic West"--emphasis on the wilderness areas of our Western States.

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