

THE ELEPAIO

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For the Better Protection of Wildlife in Hawaii

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This issue starts the third volume of The Elepaio and with it go our best wishes to all our members. Let us hope and work for a speedy end to this war so that we may get back to a sane and enjoyable life.

The recent questionnaire to members of the Society met with an encouraging response to those of us who wish to continue our activities. There was no question that the Society should cease to exist, as some seem to have thought, but only that for want of support it might suspend activities until easier times. The Society is needed to-day as much as ever, probably more, and if members would try to take more active interest they would find benefit to themselves.

There were three subjects on which the opinions of members were asked; meetings, walks and The Elepaio. Meetings will be hard to arrange at present, due mainly to the pressure of war work and the black-out. Local walks can be arranged and many expressed a wish to attend. Will those who wish to go up the Woodlawn ridge trail meet at the mauka end of Paty Drive (five minutes walk from the Woodlawn bus terminus) at 2.00 p.m. on Saturday July 18th? The trail is steep but interesting, nailed shoes are advisable. Later we might walk to the foot of the falls in Manoa Valley. Suggestions for future walks will be welcome.

The question concerning The Elepaio received the most encouraging response of the three questions and publication will continue. Mr. Munro has promised further instalments of his interesting and valuable observations, but we again urge members to try to contribute something. A note or question on a postcard takes little trouble and may be of interest and value to all. Such material should be sent to the writer at 3449 Paty Drive.

Several members asked when their subscriptions are due. All subscriptions are due on January 1st of each year, and should be sent to Miss Grenville Hatch, Secretary-Treasurer, 1560 Wilhelmina Rise. Call her if there is any doubt about payment.

Mrs E. W. Peterson, President of the Hui Manu, is expecting a further shipment of Mexican rainbow buntings from the Coast on the Clipper. We never did understand priorities but if the birds can come, so much the better. Twenty pairs were released last September in Manoa Valley and have been reported a few times since. Let us hope that some of them nested successfully this year.

A letter from Admiral Nimitz' Assistant Chief of Staff to Mr. Munro bears a message from the Admiral to say that very few gooneys were killed in the action at Midway, but "quite a few terns" were killed by the aerial attack. It is good that the Admiral can think of a little thing like that in the midst of the stupendous work he is doing.

BIRDS OF HAWAII
and
Adventures in Bird Study

An Ocean Cruise
By George C. Munro
No 8

Captain Brooks saw five palm trees on Laysan in 1858. On June 24, 1891 I made a note: "came across a clump of fan palms, at least there were only two standing but there were stumps of a number more." A photograph (undated) in the Bishop Museum was probably taken before our visit as it shows longer stems lying on the ground than any I saw. Dr. Rock has expressed the opinion that this *Prichardia* most likely grew from seed that had drifted from Nihoa. My opinion is that it was a different species as the position of the grove showed it more likely to be a remnant of former vegetation, perhaps when the island was larger and carried an indigenous forest. In the main group, so a botanist once informed me, there are instances of a different species of this palm existing on two sides of a ridge; so it is hardly likely that if this one had been indigenous to Laysan it was the same species as the one on Nihoa over 500 miles away.

When we were on Laysan the rail and *Telespiza* swarmed everywhere; the miller bird and Laysan duck were fairly numerous; the honeyeater (*Mimatione*) was the least common of the land birds. There is still a flycatcher on Nihoa but the interesting little miller bird of Laysan has gone for good. The pretty little sweet songster, the honeyeater, representative of the apapane of the main group has also gone. It is tragic that these two remarkable birds should have been unnecessarily exterminated. *Telespiza* has become a pest on Midway; why not deport a large number back to Laysan, its native home? A number of the rail should also be taken back to Laysan from Midway.

Unprotected eggs are provender for the curlew, *Telespiza* and rail. I have seen it stated that the Laysan rail cannot break the sea birds' eggs but I have seen it do so. Noddies leave their eggs sooner than the sooty terns when disturbed. The sooties would peck at our bare feet to frighten us away. One day Palmer and I stood near a noddy's egg which its owner had deserted on our approach. A rail came up and inspected it carefully. Then stretching himself he brought the end of his bill down on the egg. He worked at it for some time, flapping his flightless wing to give force to his blows. When he finally succeeded in breaking the shell he cleared a channel across the upper side of the egg and proceeded to enjoy his meal. But the noddy returned and drove him off. After walking through a tern's nesting place where there were fresh eggs we were astonished on retracing our steps to see the number of eggs the *Telespiza* and rail had destroyed in the short interval. These birds

also fed on the maggots from the dead bodies of the larger birds and even ate their flesh. The duck also fed largely on the maggots. Captain Breeth told us of a rail that had very young chicks. Men were digging guano and the mother bird was accompanying them to pick up any worms exposed by their tools. These she carried to her chicks who at times would try to follow her. This she would not permit but drove them back to the shelter of the grass bush with great excitement. I noticed five species of large moths and several of the small ones. The moths were nocturnal and were hunted from their hiding places by the birds in the daytime. The miller birds came into the houses to search the beams in the unsealed roofs. They also had an advantage of hunting there by lamplight when the occupants were spending the evening. At first they were

somewhat of a pest in the laboratory by alighting on the edge of test tubes, toppling them over and breaking them. The camp chickens gorged on the moths and would not retire to roost till after dark. The Laysan duck hunted moths round the buildings in the evenings and early mornings. The land birds were very tame. Mr. Freeth's boy caught a Telespiza and offered it an egg which it ate and when released ran up the boy's arm quite unafraid. A honeyeater sang its song while held in the hand, perhaps as a bribe for its release. The moths were called millers by the residents. A caretaker alone on Laysan in the off season for guano work used to hang a cloth outside his door overnight. In the morning he shook out the moths that filled its folds and a flock of curlew that were on the watch would run up and catch them as they fluttered off. The miller bird swallowed the moths whole, wings and all; but the honeyeater daintily picked off the wings before swallowing the juicy bodies. Freeth said it always held the moth with its left foot when severing the wings; one I saw eating a moth held the body with its claw and picked it away piece by piece. The honeyeater besides eating insects found honey in several of the flowers. Both Palmer and I saw it going over different species of flowers.

BIRD BANDING RETURN. A record of a banded bird just received is of interest. It was reported by the Australian Legation through the State Department to the Fish and Wildlife Service. The bird, a brown booby, was banded by James E. A. Kinney on Howland Island on October 27, 1938. It was then a young bird at the end of the breeding season. It was recovered at Nauru Island on March 21, 1942, three years and five months after banding, when it was nearly four years old and at the beginning of the breeding season. It was then about 1600 miles from its native island. This seems like evidence that the brown booby does not return to its native island to breed but goes far from it.

The object of banding seabirds is to obtain such records as this. There are many facts we can learn from it. Observers, however, should not remove the bands from the birds as this defeats the object for which the bird was banded. The full number on the band should be carefully noted and the bird released with the band still on its leg. If the band is removed the bird's identity is lost and it can furnish no more record.

The numbers should be sent on to the Fish and Wildlife Service at Washington D.C. or if more convenient send or telephone it to the writer at 2064 Makiki St., telephone number 93910. The observer will receive all information concerning the banding of the bird, where, when and by whom it was banded. By furnishing information such as this the observer may furnish valuable material to scientific research.

June 18, 1942

George C. Munro

THE NAVY CO-OPERATES IN BIRD PROTECTION. An excerpt from a letter from the Flag Secretary to the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz: "our various units in this area are being notified to refrain from using bird sanctuaries as targets, unless definite evidence indicates such localities are being used for purposes inimical to our national interests."

Another from the Chief of Staff of Rear Admiral David Worth Bagley Commandant of the Fourteenth Naval District who says: "However, it is my sincere hope that the needless slaughter of these birds may be avoided."

It is surely very fortunate to thus have the co-operation of the Navy in bird protection. This is especially so at present when it has such a weight to carry.

June 8, 1942

George C. Munro