

T H E E L E P A I O

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Birds of Hawaii and  
Adventures in Bird Study  
Behaviour of Birds when Protected  
(continued from last number)  
By George C. Munro

On my arrival my brother had expressed the opinion that the coot on this pond were not the Hawaiian species (Fulica alae) but the mainland species (F. americana). He based this on their tameness, tendency to fight, aversion to the gallinules, but principally to a red mark showing at the top of the frontal shield that runs from the base of the beak over the forehead. This red mark is not mentioned in any works on Hawaiian birds. I therefore spent some time with a field glass studying the birds swimming over the body of the pond and a pair with a brood of chicks which were in possession of one end of the pond. I found that the pair with the chicks had the frontal shield white. One had it much larger than the other running right up on its forehead and it also showed indistinctly small dark markings near the tip of the bill. Three others on the pond showed the red top on the frontal knob. One a large full-fledged bird in fine plumage had it much larger than the others and seemed also to have the dark spots near the end of the bill. Peale who described and named the alae keokeo gave the frontal knob as pale blue (perhaps from a dried skin). Dole called it ivory white, Rothschild a delicate ivory white and Henshaw a delicate creamy white, my notes say white. "Birds of America" 1936, published by the Garden City Publishing Company Inc. describes the frontal knob of the American coot as brown. "The Book of Birds" 1937, published by the National Geographic Society shows a colored plate with a distinctly red patch at the top of the frontal shield and reddish brown markings near the tip of the bill, but no description is given in the text. Other works give the frontal shield as brown or chocolate brown. In 1891 there was a specimen of a coot in the Gay and Robinson collection with the frontal shield chocolate brown. This was procured on Niihau by Francis Gay at a time when he shot several with the white frontal knob. The natives there were acquainted with the variety and called it alae awi. They said that its eggs differed from those of the alae keokeo as could be seen when they were beaten up together in a dish. These natives used the coot's eggs for food and this statement is therefore probably correct. This specimen was given to Palmer to send with our collection to England to determine if it were a different species. Rothschild must have received the specimen but makes no mention of it in his book. It would seem from this either that the American coot straggles to these islands occasionally or that the Hawaiian coot sometimes reverts to markings of its ancestor the American coot. This is something for the young ornithologists of the Honolulu Audubon Society to investigate.

The coots built nests and raised young on the pond at Kainalu. Two nests were in full sight from the house in the inner edge of the belt of bullrushes. From one of these, near one end of the pond a pair of birds had just hatched out a brood of chicks which the parent birds were feeding on the pond. Sometimes the male would have two and the female two. But most of the time the male went off alone as also did a chick larger than the others. The female worked hard feeding the chicks, only occasionally taking time to feed herself on long stems or leaves of an underwater grass-like plant, or to take short rests on the abandoned nest. She would dip her head under the water to bring up food which she gave to the chick. Sometimes she "tipped" till little more than her tail appeared above the surface and more rarely she dived completely below. One chick was larger than the others showing that this species retains the habit of starting incubation before the clutch of eggs is laid. When the birds scrambled up and stood on the nest there was an opportunity to study the colors of the legs and feet which have been described as pale olive greenish, bluish green, light slaty blue, and greenish gray. One of them I noted had legs and toes bluish gray, another or possibly the same one under a better light showed them greenish yellow.

These coots showed considerable wisdom in their nest building. One was near the end of the pond where the pair had chicks. It was invisible from the land side from which sometimes boys molested them probably to take their eggs. The nest was anchored by the surrounding reeds but free to rise and fall with the water and suffered no hurt in the recent heavy rains. It stands about a foot above the water and is about three feet thick at the surface. It was built of reeds brought from the opposite end of the pond by the birds. From a seat close to the pond Mrs. Munro had watched the bird at work. It packed the reeds across its shoulders till it had a sufficient load and swam back to the nest site with it. By doing this she did not thin the cover near the nest as would have been the case if she had gathered the large amount of material needed from close at hand. The reeds were tamped down firmly by the bird's feet and the clapping noise distinctly heard across the pond.

It was fascinating to watch these birds and I could not help thinking of the entertainment that could be provided the people of Oahu if inviolable bird sanctuaries were established. The Kaelepulu pond between Kailua and Lanikai would be ideal for the people of Honolulu to visit. It would lend itself admirably for this purpose. With protection the large variety of native and migratory birds there would become tame and the sight of them provide endless entertainment. The trustees for the owners of the site are sympathetic with the effort to save the native birds and I am sure would consider favorably an offer from the City and County of Honolulu for a lease of the pond for this purpose. Could not the Honolulu Audubon Society work on this? Few towns have an equally favorable site for a bird sanctuary so easily available.

Feb. 23, 1943

The condolences of the Society go to Mr. Munro on the death of his brother, Mr. James G. Munro, a visit to whose home on Molokai is described above. In 1931 I met Mr. James Munro, when I was doing some work for the Bishop Museum on ulu maika courses. He was most helpful and took me in his car over the island and showed me where several courses had been ploughed up. One course was left undamaged, perhaps the finest example which remains in the Islands, and he helped me to measure and describe it.

The alae awi, also mentioned by Mr. Munro, is described by Menshaw as a gallinule, (*Porphyrio melanotus* Newton), and not a coot. He states that it was introduced from Australia and seemed rather numerous in the taro patches and rice swamps of Oahu, but so far as he was informed it had not reached the other islands. That was forty years ago and it may have disappeared, I have tried to find it in recent years without success.

Mr. Munro's concluding paragraph about making Kaelepulu Pond a sanctuary was one of the first projects of our Audubon Society. In June 1939 a letter was sent to the chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Bishop Estate setting out the importance of the pond as a nesting place for stilts, coots and medhens and a winter home for numbers of plovers, turnstones, tattlers and several species of ducks. It was pointed out that the grazing rights and fishing rights would not be disturbed. The Board replied that the Trustees were sympathetic with the effort to create bird sanctuaries and as soon as the lease on this area to Mr. L.W. Campos expired (which will be in 1946) the Trustees will be glad to discuss the matter with the Society.

J.d'A.N.

HAWAIIAN CONSERVATION SOCIETY. We have received a notice of the organization of a new society with this title, headed by Mr. Chas. M. Dunn, Vice-President of the Honolulu Audubon Society. Its aims seem to be much the same as those of our society and it has our best wishes.

PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER. In November 1941 the Society went to Kahuku for a bird walk. Kahuku is one of the best places on the island for birds and we saw plenty that day. Plover, sanderling and turnstones were on the pastures and we saw some pectoral sandpipers at the edge of one of the small pools. There was an immature herring gull at the lake and a flock of sixteen pintail.

As we walked across the pastures we saw a plover running and tumbling about. Karen Steele went after it and caught it and we found that one of its wings was broken and hanging by a thread of sinew. We cut this and the Steeles took the bird home. After a few days they gave it to the Bird Park at Kapiolani Park and it is there now, in fine condition. The loss of one wing is not at all noticeable and the bird is very handsome. At first it was distressing to see its attempts at flight, it would jump into the air, only to be thrown to the ground when it flapped its single wing. Now it tries no more and looks quite happy. It has put on its summer plumage, glossy black below, separated from the speckled golden and black upperparts by a broad white line running from the head down the sides of the body.

BIRD WALK. Ten of us set off up the Woodlawn ridge trail on April 17th for the walk. We were glad to welcome three newcomers, Mrs. Francis Evans, Miss Evans and Miss Milroy. Their first walk with the Society was a steep one and we got a wetting as well. The birds were singing well as it is the nesting season, but they did not show themselves as much as we should have liked. Nothing special to report, just another enjoyable walk. Next walk, meet corner of Punahou and Nehoa at 2.00 p.m. May 15th for Tantalus walk.

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