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BIRDS OF HAWAII
and
Adventures in Bird Study

An Ocean Cruise
By George C. Munro
No. 2

Leaving Laysan we started on June 27 with a good breeze for Lisiansky Island 100 miles away but the wind fell light and we did not arrive till June 29.

Lisiansky Island is much smaller than Laysan. Different surveys or estimates give its area as 32, 49 and 72 acres while Laysan is given as 288 acres. It has a barrier reef on the northwest, inside of which we had a good anchorage. On the southwest there is a fringing reef or series of reefs running out about 30 or 40 miles. It is not so well covered with vegetation as Laysan. We saw one portulaca which we had not seen on Laysan. The grass was shorter and had a thinner leaf; when dry and rubbed down to its strong fiber it made good filling for the skins when we ran out of material for that purpose. There was some shrubbery round the depressed center of the island.

When we came to the lagoon and neared a sand island some seals were seen lying asleep on the beach. This created excitement. Rifles were brought out and several seals were shot but they proved of no commercial value and it was really a waste of life of a rare species. We wanted a specimen and a few days after killed a large bull as he lay asleep alongside another that had been shot. I approached him carefully and stunned him by striking him across the forehead with a stick of bamboo I picked up on the beach. We then easily dispatched him. We took off his skin which was about half an inch thick. His stomach was full of half digested fish, the flesh of these was infested with parasitical worms. The carcass was across the island from our tent. Next morning I packed the skin across the island on the end of a bamboo pole. On the other end of the pole I had the seal's head and one of the partial albino albatrosses that I had found when crossing the island. The skin must have weighed about 100 pounds. It was a most tiring tramp, every few yards I would sink into petrel burrows to my knees, take a short rest and struggle on. I did not think at the time of the number of shearwaters I was smothering in their burrows. My birdbanding companions on the Oahu islands are careful to examine any burrows they happen to trample to rescue trapped birds. We lost the skin eventually, the hair slipped and we had to throw it overboard. The head was probably also thrown away. The species was subsequently described from a specimen (I think only a head) sent to Europe from Laysan by Schauinsland.

Wedge-tailed shearwaters were numerous at sea before we reached

the island. Many of their burrows and those of the Bonin Island petrel were all over the island. The shearwaters were sitting on their eggs but there were only a few of the full fledged young of the petrel which seemed to have been left to starve by the old birds. The shrubbery round the depressed center of the island was taken up by frigate birds and red-footed boobys as nesting sites. We saw here the mottled-back phase of the red-footed booby brooding on her chick on a nest. There were a few brown boobys and a number of the blue-faced. One of these collided with the boat and disgorged two long garfish. This fish is long and thin and the birds to ingest them have to fold them over several times. I have since examined a white-tailed tropic bird on Lanai that had one of these fishes in three folds in its throat. Black-footed albatrosses were along the upper margin of the beaches and Laysan albatrosses were over the whole island but not so thickly placed as on Laysan. We found two partial albinos of the latter, rather striking looking birds. This species was further developed than on Laysan, already exercising their wings whenever the wind freshened. One evening when wandering alone I saw a wonderful sight. The wind struck the island with varying force at different places. Where it struck strongly nearly all the gooneys along its current "would spread and wave their wings, jumping off the ground and sometimes flying a short distance. Often they would then turn and walk back to their starting point. It was a fine sight to see the mass of waving wings. At times the whole island seemed in motion. They got so mixed up that the old birds sometimes had a great hunt to find their own young. The wing feathers are well developed when the body is still covered with down which still clings to the ends of the feathers. A number used to go out in the morning for a swim in the lagoon and might be seen a quarter of a mile out with wings extended. These youngsters had to pass through a number of nesting blue-faced boobys with large young ones. One day I witnessed a fight between a young gooney and a young booby. The booby fought viciously but the gooney with snapping of its bill rather than biting.

Rabbits were later released on Lisiansky. They destroyed all the vegetation and died of starvation.

Sharks were not numerous at Lisiansky. I remarked to Bill one day that I was tempted to take refuge from the heat by jumping into the lagoon. He advised against it, saying that 'you didn't know when there might be a big one lurking under the keel'. Sure enough next day a lean 12 foot shark was hauled in. He had in his stomach bones and articles that had been thrown over the side a day or two before.

Blowflies were not so numerous as on Laysan. But the species seemed to me to be larger. We saw no fat-bodied moths though there were three species smaller than those on Laysan and also a number of the small ones common on Laysan. There were several species of spiders ranging from small ones up to large ones with nearly an inch of spread.

We felt the heat very much at Lisiansky. Sitting in the tent working on the specimens with few clothes on the perspiration streamed off one. A bird tick annoyed us. Its bite itched for a long time. As on Laysan shoes could not be worn as sand soon filled them when one sank in the petrel burrows. It seemed curious to see the Governor of the island of Laysan walking about barefooted. The burrows collapsed readily under his extra weight. We bathed often as the water was shallow and there was little danger from sharks.

Lisiansky was not nearly so interesting an island as Laysan. But in spite of the great heat, our uncomfortably hard bed on the sand, ticks biting our feet, we left it with regret and set sail for the Pearl and Hermes Reef July 4, 1891.

Jan. 22, 1942

Our gardens now have a greatly increased number of cardinals visiting the bird tables and a few notes on them may be of interest.

They were introduced to Hawaii by the Hui Manu and Mr. W. McInerney, the Kentucky cardinal in 1929-31 and the Brazilian in 1928-31. The Brazilian has a grey back and is white below, with a red head, neck and crest. The sexes are alike in color. The Pope cardinal, similar to the Brazilian but without a crest, was introduced in 1931 but apparently failed to become established.

The commonest visitors are the Kentucky cardinals, the male of which is all red with a black face and the female grey brown above with a flush of red on the wings and tail. She is greyish white below, with a red beak. Both have a crest which usually lies down so that just a point sticks out at the back of the head. Pictures of the cardinal usually show the crest erect but the normal position is down, it is erected only when the bird is excited.

Young ones show the difference in sexes at an early age, the males having increasing amounts of red while the females resemble the adult female. Both sexes in the young have blackish beaks until the first autumn.

The adults start to moult in July. In August they look most untidy, black patches showing among the red feathers, but in a few weeks they are bright and sleek again.

The Kentucky, or redbird as it is called in the South, is found in the United States east of the Great Plains and even up into Canada, where it is established along the shores of Lake Erie. It is more or less resident throughout its range. Linnaeus first named the bird *Loxia cardinalis* in 1758, the generic name was later changed to *Cardinalis*, then to *Richmondia* and still later four subspecies were recognized, the Florida, Louisiana, Grey-tailed and Arizona cardinals. They have no apparent field differences. The full name of the cardinal is therefore *Richmondia cardinalis cardinalis*. Those cardinals found in California were probably introduced from the East.

The nest is usually built in a bush or small tree, seldom more than twelve or fifteen feet from the ground. It is lightly constructed of coarse grasses and dead leaves and lined with finer grasses. One nest in our garden this year was built on a horizontal branch of an ironwood tree and in rough weather it fell off the branch when the young were half grown. I do not think it was knocked off by a cat or mongoose, since the tree was banded with a sheet of tin. One nestling was found dead on the ground, the other two had disappeared.

The eggs number 2-4, usually three, whitish ground color thickly marked with greyish brown, chiefly at the larger end.

The well-known call note is a sharp "chip", and the song usually delivered by the male from high in a tree, is a series of clear ringing notes, "dee-ur, dee-ur, dee-ur, whee-chu, whee-chu, whee-chu". The female also sings at times, which is unusual among birds. Her notes are softer than the male's. The song may be heard almost any month of the year, but in the spring the males sing loud and clear, serving notice to other males that the adjacent territory is their private domain and also telling any unattached female that there is a choice feeding area where she can build her nest. If all goes well she does so and the male takes charge of the young when they leave the nest and she starts off again with another family. Two or even three broods are reared and it is interesting to note the change in the behaviour of the parents when the young are able to take care of themselves. Up to that time the male is pestered by the young for food and

although he works hard they are always following him around, shivering their wings and calling their chattering hunger cry. But a day comes when he has had enough. Now they call in vain, he drives them away to find feeding areas of their own. They wander far afield, being driven off by one male after another as they encroach on his territory, until they find a place where there are no jealous males and they can settle down. Thus the continual spread of the race is ensured.

Every year in the autumn I am asked, "Where have the cardinals gone? They don't sing in the garden any more". This apparent absence of the birds is a result of the breaking up of the birds' territories at the end of the breeding season, but in the spring they will return to sing again.

The favorite food of the cardinal is sunflower seed, but according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Farmers' Bulletin 755 "its food is composed of 29% animal matter and 71% vegetable. At most not more than 2% of the cardinal's food, probably less, consists of useful insects, while twelve times as much is made up of injurious species. Grasshoppers, together with true bugs, form more than one tenth of the total food. Especially commendable is the destruction of scale insects. The bird has a record for feeding on many of the worst agricultural pests. Weed seed forms more than a third of the total food. The redbird occupies an important place among birds devouring weed seeds."

The cardinal has repaid many thousandfold the money spent in bringing it to Hawaii and in addition gives enjoyment to all with its bright color and cheery song.

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J.d'A.N.

EARLY BIRD RECORDS. From ms. log of Capt. Clerke, 1779 (with Capt. James Cook) at Hawaii.

The Birds of these Islands are as beautiful as any we have seen during the Voyage, and are numerous though not various. There are four which seem to belong to the Irochili or Honey Suckers of Linnaeus, one of which is something larger than a Bullfinch (1), its colour is a fine glossy black, the rump, vent and thighs deep yellow; another (2) is of an exceeding bright Scarlet Colour, the wings and tail black; a third (3) which seems to be either a young bird or variety of the Foregoing is variegated with red, brown and yellow; the fourth (4) is intirely Green with a tinge of yellow. There is a species of Thrush with a grey Breast (5); and a small bird of the Fly-catcher kind; a Rail (7) with very short wings and no tail, which on that account we called *Rallus ecaudatus*. Ravens (8) are found here but they are very scarce, their colour is dark brown inclining to black, and their note is different from those of Europe. Here are two small birds both of one Genus, that are very common; one (9) is red and is generally seen about the Coconut Trees, particularly when they are in flower from whence it seems to derive great part of its subsistence; the other (10) is green; the tongues of both are long and ciliated or fringed at the Tip. A Bird (11) with a yellow head which from the structure of its beak we called a parroquet, is like very common; it however by no means belongs to that Tribe, but greatly resembles the *Loxia flavicans* or Yellowish Crossbill of Linnaeus.

There are also Owls (12), Plover (13 and 14) of two sorts, one very like the whistling Plover of Europe, a large whitish Pigeon (15) a Bird (16) with a long tail whose colour is black, the vent, and feathers under the wings (which are much longer than is usually seen in the generality of birds except the Bird of Paradise) are yellow and the Common water or darker Hen (17).

The above very interesting extract from the log of Capt. Clerke

written 163 years ago, was contributed by Miss M. Titcomb, Librarian of the B. P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu. Most of the birds can be readily identified from the descriptions, which show considerable knowledge of birds and the ability to depict them clearly and concisely. (1) is the mamo, *Drepanis pacifica*, now extinct, (2) the iiwi, *Vestiaria coccinea*, still plentiful, (3) young iiwi. Capt. Clerke surmised that these variegated yellow birds were iiwi, though the natives and even ornithologists later thought they were a different species. (4) Possibly the green solitaire, *Viridonia sagittirostris*. I do not think the amakihi was indicated, since that is described below. (5) Hawaii thrush, omoa, *Phaeornis obscura obscura*, still to be found. (6) Hawaii elepaio, *Chasiempis sandwichensis sandwichensis*, still plentiful. (7) Sandwich rail or moho, *Pennula millsi*, extinct. (8) Hawaiian crow, *Corvus tropicus*. (9) apapane, *Himatione sanguinea*, still plentiful. (10) Hawaii amakihi, *Chlorodrepanis virens virens*, still plentiful. (11) ou, *Psittirostra psittacea*, formerly plentiful but now nearly extinct. See Elepaio, Vol. 1, pp. 17, 23. (12) Hawaiian owl, pueo, *Asio flammeus sandwichensis*, still common. (13 and 14) Pacific golden plover, kolea, *Pluvialis dominica fulva* and perhaps the black-bellied plover, *Squatarola squatarola*, though perhaps another migrant may be indicated, such as the wandering tattler or turnstone. (15) What is it? No pigeons were endemic to Hawaii. (16) Hawaii Owl, *Acrulocercus nobilis*, now probably extinct. (17) Hawaiian coot, alae keokeo or perhaps the mudhen, alae ula, *Gallinula chloropus sandvicensis*.

J.d'A.N.

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PETERSON PLATES.

The Society has received a gift from the National Audubon Society of two beautiful reproductions of paintings by Roger Tory Peterson. They were described and illustrated in the May-June issue of Audubon Magazine. They are of the Blue Jay and Cardinal, and when framed will make splendid pictures for our meeting room, when we can meet again.

TERRITORIAL ELECTIONS.

We shall soon be voting again, let us remember the friends of the birds, foremost being Senator Francis Brown. And on the other side, Rep. Lindsley Austin, who wants to shoot plover.

RECOMMENDED READING.

We can thoroughly recommend "Pageant in the Sky" by Raymond S. Deck, which is in the Library of Hawaii. There are many books which have been written covering the same ground but this is the best of the lot that we have come across. Although particular advice on attracting birds refers to the author's experience in Connecticut many of the principles will be useful to us here.