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BIRDS OF HAWAII and Adventures in Bird Study

An Ocean Cruise
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No. 10

On leaving Lisiansky Island on July 4, 1891 Captain Walker before hoisting anchor sent a boat to sound a coral patch near by to ensure a safe exit. It proved to have only eight feet of water over it. As our vessel drew nine feet it was necessary to "kedge" her clear of it. To do this the small boat pulled out some distance and dropped an anchor and the schooner was pulled up to the anchor. This was repeated till clear of the patch and safe for hoisting sail. With a good breeze we were soon outside the reef, safe from the submerged coral patches, headed for the Pearl and Hermes Reef 130 miles away. The breeze kept up well next day and on July 6, at 9 A.M. we sighted breakers. We sailed along the reef for some miles before we came to the entrance.

Pearl and Hermes Reef forms a semicircle to the northwest. It had not, at that time, been properly surveyed but the reef was estimated to have a circumference of about 30 miles: 16 miles the greatest width of the lagoon. There were several islands on the reef though we saw only two or three. We anchored about five miles from the largest we saw which seemed over a mile long and had some low vegetation. This was verified by a carpenter bee coming alongside and a yellowish skip-jack beetle alighting on the coat of the man at the wheel as had happened when approaching Laysan. The beetle was also probably of the same species as that one, well marked with a black spot at each end of its body. We did not see many birds as we were well inside the lagoon and the birds come and go from the open sea. We had seen numbers of wedge-tailed shearwaters before we came in. There were also a few frigates, tropic birds and sooty tern. Of fish large ulua were plentiful and some were hooked and taken.

Next day the schooner was brought to within three or four miles of the island, but there were so many submerged coral patches and sand bars that the captain would not venture a landing. We were disappointed as the weather was fine and the water glassy smooth. The sand bars, which were distinguished from the coral patches by showing white on the water were a feature new to us; some of them were long and curved like a coral reef, others in patches.

We left the Pearl and Hermes Reef at 8 A.M. on July 7. A good breeze took us out but it fell and we experienced calms for two days with the sails flapping most of the time and the water like glass. The sea was full of small slimy masses of plankton, "whale food" the sailors call it. In calm weather it forms into lumps; the longer the calm the larger the lumps become. Wedge-tailed shearwaters sat in large flocks on the water, sooty tern picked up the small fish from the

surface as the larger fish drove them up. Boobies dived from up in the air sounding their loud croaking quack as they came down. Several sharks were caught between the Pearl and Hermes and Midway Island. Pilot fish followed one of these to the surface; another had several young about two feet long inside it, the umbilical cord still attached. These, when cut free and thrown into the sea swam off with alacrity. One specimen, unique for the trip was about 10 feet long, slender with long pointed snout, large eyes and curved teeth. Small fish swarmed round the boat and two large species; one was the mahimahi or dolphin. Some small whales, larger than porpoises travelled fast across our course some distance astern. On rising to the surface we could see their dorsal fins and hear their exhaling "blow". The Captain said they were real dolphin.

Midway was sighted from aloft in the afternoon of the 10th. The wind was light and we were hove to for part of the night and sighted the island from the deck in the morning. A breeze came up and we sailed through the passage in the reef and anchored about a mile and a half from the shore. We landed and took a stroll round the island. There were many curlew on the beach and on the roof of the lone little house which stood on the bare sand. These birds were very tame and followed us along the beach like a flock of domestic fowl, approaching within a few feet of us. They were thin and in frayed plumage as if just finished raising their young; but we saw no young birds. In a patch of grass at the southwest end of the island a flock of sooty tern had young nearly full-fledged. A tropic bird was nesting under the house and in the night a solitary wedge-tailed shearwater wailed dismally just outside, while a little white tern fledgling was sitting inside the doorway. These were the only signs of birds on the island, except eggshells, bones and bundles of dried gooney meat hanging on the walls inside the house. The bird meat had been collected by the Walker family two years before as a store on which they depended for food during the off season of the birds and without which they would otherwise have starved.

To be continued

THE WHITE-EYE

The white-eye or mejiro (white-eye in Japanese) belongs to a large family of birds, the Zosteropidae, members of which are scattered throughout the Indian and Australian regions, from Madagascar to Japan. Our particular species, *Zosterops palpebrosus japonicus*, is a subspecies from Japan, whence they were introduced to Hawaii in 1929.

On Oahu it has spread rapidly and now may be found from the sea shore to the tops of the mountains. On the island of Hawaii it has not increased at all rapidly and is still rather a scarce bird there. Perhaps the hill robin (*Leiothrix*), which was liberated earlier there and is now plentiful, occupied the ecological niche which the white-eye might have had had it arrived first. The reverse case obtains on Oahu, where the hill robin is scarce. A study of the food of the two birds might throw light on this.

The white-eye is about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, the sexes being very similar in color. Above it is olive green, a yellow throat, whitish below with a conspicuous white ring around the eye. Beak black, long and slender.

It is very active and is usually seen in small parties passing through the bushes and trees, busily searching for insects. The little birds are hardly still for a moment and keep up a constant tittering

to keep in touch with each other. The note may be written "tsee" but it is varied in inflection and sometimes runs into a rapid "trreee". The song is a rapid chatter, not very musical but held in some esteem by the Japanese. It is a favorite cage bird with them and singing contests are held, the winner being not the bird with the best song but the one which sings the most times. There are two societies in Honolulu which sponsor these contests and membership runs into hundreds. The birds are often kept in very small cages less than a foot square. One bird we watched for some time was never still a moment, rapidly circling its small cage, continually looping the loop, the movement was so rapid that it was hard to say whether the wings or legs aided most. It was distressing to see such an active bird confined in such a small cage but the owner said that the birds do not like a large cage. By its actions the mejiro showed that it did not like any sort of cage. Fortunately this bird was liberated, due to the difficulty of obtaining the special food they require.

The nest is very beautiful, a small cup the size of half an orange woven of fine fibers and slung beneath the horizontal fork of a twig. Outside it is covered with green moss and is hard to see as it is usually among a spray of leaves at the end of a twig. The eggs are white, generally three are laid.

The white-eye is an insect eater and must devour great quantities of injurious insects. One has only to watch them feeding for a short time to realise how thoroughly they search the twigs and leaves of the bushes. They often hang head down to examine the under parts of the leaves and little in the way of scale insects and other pests escapes them. They take a certain amount of fruit but the harm they do is more than compensated by their destruction of insect pests.

They are also fond of nectar. I once watched one piercing the bases of hibiscus flowers for the nectar, just as bumble bees often do with flowers such as snapdragons. This gave me an idea. I sent for some humming bird feeders, small colored glass containers which are filled with sugar solution and clipped to the twigs of a bush. They had not been in position more than a day or two before the white-eyes found them and now they are quickly emptied. The birds are so fond of the sugar that they even lick the outside of the glass where the solution has dried. Almost any small jar will do, an Alka-Seltzer tube (small size) is very suitable. Try it in your garden.

J.d'A.N.

BIRD WALK on September 19th., by O.M.N.

The afternoon was clear and bright for the Audubon walk. Nine enthusiastic hikers started from Tantalus along the trail overlooking Pauoa valley. Field glasses and movie cameras gave the casual observer the impression of a scientific expedition but the rest of the party just went along for the fun.

From such a height the green valley and the wide expanse of blue Pacific spread before us and made us overlook the occasionally muddy trail. The fragrance of white and yellow ginger hung on the warm afternoon air. Masses of ginger and ieie gave, even to those of us without cameras, enduring pictures of indescribable loveliness. Red lehua flowered in profusion as we went farther up the trail. Crickets chirped, white-eyes twittered and familiar forest sounds were all about us but the birds seemed to have Saturday afternoon off too. And then - we saw an elepaio - the friendliest little creature, who cheerfully obliged everyone by perching within three feet.

All too soon we had to leave the forest behind us, with its cool trees, fragrant ginger and shy birds.

Next walk: meet October 17th., 2.00 p.m. at corner of Nehoa and Puna-hou, for another trail up Tantalus.