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Birds of Hawaii and Adventures in Bird Study

Notes on Migrations and Straggling Birds (continued)
By George C. Munro

A letter written me from the same island by a later connection, dated October 8, 1943, said: "At present there are many ducks here, all of them arriving exhausted. ... A single mallard drake was seen about a week ago but he seems to have been a lonely traveller. There are also some pintails. But the largest number is of a species which I have never seen before and which I cannot identify. They are a uniform gray-brown and have a square of greenish iridescence on the wings. They are larger than a teal, smaller than the pintails. Many of the men from the western states say they have seen such ducks before in Oregon and Washington, where they are called Widgeon. They are definitely not the American Widgeon or Baldpate, having no white on the crown. Their flight too is slow and straight and lacks the darting uncertainty of the other bird ... I have no reference book in which to check." The nearest I can connect them with is the Florida duck or the Black duck, both of the eastern states. The description is more like that of the gray duck of New Zealand and Australia. But it is quite unlikely that they are any of these. (Possibly female baldpates, which lack the white crowns of the males. J.d'A.N.)

In the Honolulu Star-Bulletin of October 19, 1943, there was a note. "A flock of pintail ducks ... flew to Palmyra, home of the gooney birds. ... Ensign Arthur Murphy reported the arrival of the ducks. ... Some had tabs placed 82 days previously at the Bear River migratory bird refuge in northeast Utah." There are several species of boobies but no gooney birds on Palmyra. I shall try to have it arranged that any ducks visiting there at the end of this year will be caught and banded when they arrive exhausted and easy to catch. It will be very interesting to find to which part of the mainland they return.

Other migratory birds reported from Palmyra are: Pacific golden plover, bristle-thighed curlew, wandering tattler, turnstone, "and a small gray plover with black stripes on head and wings, black throat, white belly, and the general look of a Chickadee, which is called a wideawake (from its habit of calling at night)." This is perhaps the sanderling changing from summer or immature plumage to the adult winter plumage which we often see on the beaches here, were it not for the black throat.

On November 6, 1943 a Point Barrow Gull alighted on a groin off the shore at Kahaluu, Oahu. From a little distance it seemed a dirty white or light gray in color, with a little black about the head and ends of wings; red and white about the bill and some brown near its

tip; its legs were yellowish. Its flight was unmistakably the slow flap, flap of this gull of which I have seen a number, but never before one so light in color. This species frequently straggle to these islands but do not thrive here. I know of two that were so reduced and weak that they were unable to rise from the beach.

Since writing the foregoing I have come across a report I made to the Bishop Museum in 1940 which gives an idea of our banding work for that year. 4357 were banded on the Equatorial Islands, 1056 in Hawaii, 749 on Midway and 71 on Wake Island. A total of 6233 birds of 12 species on 10 substations by 8 cooperative bird-banders. 327 were recorded as returning to the island on which they were banded. A hurricane buried the remaining bands on Wake Island and banding there was discontinued.

On Hawaii station 14 banding trips were taken, 9 by me and 5 by David Woodside who banded 902 birds and recorded 100 returns. Walter Donaghho did the banding on Midway. James E. A. Kinney banded 3200 of 7 species on Jarvis Island and others banded 1000 more there. I stated in error in this report that a return of a wedge-tailed shearwater was one of three nestlings that I had banded on Jarvis Island in 1938. But the three I banded were adults. The one nestling seen was too young to band.

In 1939 Kinney collected a specimen of a pintail duck that landed in a dying condition on Jarvis Island. Another duck was reported on Howland Island in 1939 but it was not captured or identified.

On Midway Island a large strange albatross came in 1938 and 1939 and another in 1940 or 41. The first one died there and was buried without any specimen being taken by which it might be identified. From a photograph kindly given me by Fred Hadden I took it to be an immature wandering albatross. Donaghho who saw the other one is sure it is an immature short-tailed albatross.

A specimen of a white-throated storm petrel (Nesofregetta albigularis) was collected by Kinney on Howland Island near the end of October, 1938. This extends the range of the species which was known from Christmas Island, Phoenix group, Fiji, New Hebrides and Marquesas.

Fred Hadden in the Planter's monthly mentioned, besides the albatross, visitants to Midway as wild ducks, bittern, hawk and goatsucker. He said they generally died there. He also mentioned two species of gulls which stayed only a few days. Mr. T. M. Blackman who spent some time on Midway saw several gulls one of which I think was an ivory gull.

Walter Donaghho in notes kindly given me lists 9 species of stragglers he saw on Midway in 1940 and 1941. He reports seeing black-bellied plover on October 1, 1940, and July 12 and 29, 1941. Pectoral sandpiper on October 6, 13, 20, November 26, May 16, 1941 and July 18, 1941. From 4 to 8 were seen at a time. On November 2, 1940, a Hudsonian curlew; June 15, 1940 greater yellow-legs. He felt sure of its identification. August 17, 1940 a lesser yellow-legs which he said had not been reported before. On December 5, 1940 he saw what he judged to be two glaucous gulls and on the 28th two white-tailed tropic birds. On October 1, 1940 he saw what looked like a mallard drake, and on the 6th two mallard ducks and on November 26 a mallard drake. On November 3, 1940 a duck was given him which he could not identify with any mainland ducks and thought it might have come from the Asiatic side, as storms had been prevalent from that direction. However, I expect he saved the specimen and some time will have it identified.

Feb. 17, 1944

BIRDS AND THE ARMY

On January 25 I received a telephone call from Colonel L.D. Weddington. He wished to know if any birds were nesting on Kaohikaipo. The Army had a plan to experiment with smoke on the island but did not wish to hurt any birds that might be there. I informed him that it was unlikely that any birds would be nesting there now and that there would be few if any birds there at all. It is very satisfactory to have such assistance from the Army in caring for our birds.

Three species of sea birds nest on Kaohikaipo. The Hawaiian tern which might start to lay in March or April but in very small numbers. Bulwer's petrel in larger numbers lays early in June deep in the rock piles. The wedge-tailed shearwater nests there in burrows but not in large numbers. They come in early in April and lay in the middle of June. The variety of this shearwater there is interesting in that its legs and feet are of a most delicate pearly white, having scarcely any of the brownish marks on the outside of the tibiae such as most birds of the species have.

Kaohikaipo is one of our safest islands for the gentle little Bulwer's petrel as rats cannot land on it. It with Mokulii and Moku Manu has a rough coastline and no large boats can tie up close to it, so rats have difficulty in getting ashore. There is hope for Bulwer's petrel so long as the Norway rat can be kept off its nesting islands.

Feb. 21, 1944

G.C. Munro

There seems to have been misunderstanding about my statement in regard to the sooty tern in the January issue. I certainly believe that the sooty tern changes nesting sites but I have no positive evidence of it. Of the thousands banded on the southern islands, Midway and Wake none have ever been reported at a distance from where they were banded. This holds good also for all the other terns. A number of noddies were banded on Manana and a few weak ones that were banded drifted ashore on Oahu but none have been reported from afar. Later I shall treat on the evidence I have of these birds and some other species changing nesting places and the probable reason for their doing so. I shall also go into the evidence showing the probability of the terns, boobies and other species raising more than one chick in a season.

George C. Munro

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Members of the Audubon Society, and their friends, twelve in all, met at the end of Paty Drive on March 11th, for our monthly walk. A short trip had been planned, as a rare treat was in store for us - - the showing of Miss Peppin's colored motion pictures of birds.

We started up the valley, leaving weird but successful signs to mark the trail for two late comers. The path lies close to a mountain stream, which has cut a deep path for itself through the valley. At one point the water has cut away half the soil from under two trees, which are anchored only by roots on one side, the roots on the stream side forming a network extending horizontally several feet above the water. On this day, the stream seemed far too gentle to work such destruction. It flowed quietly in and out of many small pools, clear, yet with a curious, faintly milky coloration. The recent rains had left the trail fresh and green. The steep banks were carpeted with many varieties of ferns, and other tiny plants grew thickly along the way. Kukui, mountain apple and guava trees shade the path.

Soon we reached a spot where the path rose steeply between the enclosing slopes. A few adventurous ones scrambled up the sides, or through the miniature cascade of the stream. They went on a short distance, and returned to report one hill robin seen.

Elepaio called all about us, but were unusually shy of appearing, only three being seen on the walk. The hill robin's song was heard distantly, but only one was seen.

Four members, unable to join us in time for the walk, met us on our return to the Northwood's home. Here we found that Mrs. Northwood had prepared a delicious and bountiful tea, which was greatly appreciated, as well as much enjoyed.

Then Miss Peppin showed us two reels of pictures. The first, of perching birds, shows a prewar bird walk, and some of our Oahu mountain trails. The birds include the Brazilian and Kentucky cardinals, the hill robin, the apapane, iiwi and a brief glimpse of the amakihi. The pictures are delightful - - the gayly colored birds shown in a beautiful setting of lehua and mamani, busy with their pursuits. The iiwi, perhaps the most beautiful, poses so that his long curved beak is shown to the best advantage.

The second reel, of sea and shore birds, shows the noddy terns on Rabbit Island, their eggs on the rocks, and the chicks. Two chicks fighting vigorously over a choice resting place provide an entertaining bit. There are also pictures of a reluctant shearwater pulled from his burrow, and of a dainty, helpless shearwater chick, looking like a bit of animated eiderdown.

The remaining pictures in the reel were taken at Moanalua, of the coot and gallinule in a beautiful setting of water lilies; and of the pintail and the stilt in the fishpond. The wandering tattler perched upon a favorite rock poses so quietly that he affords time to study him. The stilt pictures are extremely beautiful, the sharply patterned black and white birds silhouetted against the grey-blue water.

The afternoon was an interlude not often found in our war world of today - a brief return to the peace of nature, a happy gathering of friends in a lovely hospitable home, and the pictures to recall vividly the wider fields of yesterday, and to hold out promises of similar pleasures in the days to come.

Grenville Hatch

The Society is grateful to Mrs. Henry F. Damon for her kind permission to visit the gardens at Moanalua to take the pictures.

We have received a postcard from Walter Donaghho, dated 2/21/44 at Letterman General Hospital, San Francisco. "Arrived here from New Caledonia. Have accumulated extensive notes on birds of New Caledonia, New Hebrides, New Zealand and, of course, Guadalcanal. Will write article for Elepaio when I get my bag (now in storage). That article by the marine in the January Elepaio was about New Hebridean birds. Now I can tell all. Sincerely, Pfc Walter Donaghho."

Next Bird Walk: meet Punahou and Nehoa, April 15th, 2.00 p.m.

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