

# THE ELEPAIO

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## Birds of Hawaii and Adventures in Bird Study

A Visit to Moku Manu  
By George C. Munro

On August 18, 1943 I was fortunate to have an invitation from Dr. Kenneth Emory to join an expedition to Moku Manu, the bird island three quarters of a mile off the coast of Oahu. The object was to obtain moving pictures of the birds on the island. This was desirable in connection with the South Sea exhibition which Dr. Emory is conducting in the Bishop Museum.

This exhibition is an important life saving project to show aviators cast adrift at sea or landing on uninhabited islands of the Pacific how they can sustain life till rescued. Dr. Emory is admirably suited to direct this as his ethnological studies brought him into contact with a great variety of islands of the Pacific and with the lore of the native inhabitants. The party consisted of seven members including Captain A. A. Stoltz of the Army Ranger School and Captain William G. Anderson whose launch carried us.

The expedition was successful and the landing unusually easy. As we approached the island a young brown booby flew round the boat. I hoped it was "Gus", the bird my grandson had tamed while it had a disabled wing, which, when its wing recovered, flew out to sea. I hoped he would alight on the boat as "Gus" used to ride on the stern of the boy's boat as he rowed around. However, it did not alight and we had no opportunity to look for Gus' band. Its number is 40-721701 so if anyone who has read this should find a brown booby with a band of that number on its leg will know it was a tame booby, glad and appreciative of human help when in distress, which felt the call of the wild as soon as it was in condition to fend for itself. The next 58 bands from that number I attached to well grown young red-footed boobies on the top of the island. There were a number of young of both boobies on the wing and a great number of young of the red-footed on the nests in the down and nearly full fledged.

We found 9 species on the island. There were a number of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  weeks old wedge-tailed shearwaters in holes and recesses in the rocks and no doubt many more in burrows; one nearly fledged Christmas Island shearwater was among the rocks where this species had been seen in previous years. I did not see any Bulwer's petrel but am almost sure they are there as I have banded them on islands north and south of Moku Manu. Nor did I see any tropic birds; red-tailed have been seen near the island and the white-tailed species nests in the cliffs on the mainland of Oahu not far away. They nested on Mokolii, off Kualoa Point, Oahu in 1901 and I have seen a pair with their egg on Mokuhooniki off the south east coast of Molokai, showing that the species nests on offshore islands. As usual there was a small number of brown boobies and probably up to a thousand of the red-footed booby on the two

islands; there were a number of frigate birds but as in the past no nests were seen. One full fledged young gray-backed tern rose and flew up the side of the island; sooty tern were in unusually small numbers, another lot would probably come in later; noddies were numerous with large young; Hawaiian tern were also numerous, some had newly hatched chicks, I saw two alive and two dead. There did not seem to be fresh eggs of any species. I just had word from Palmyra that the sooty tern leave there in August after rearing their young so perhaps they come on here to raise another brood as in October 1940 they were in very large numbers on Moku Manu with large young ones. Once, when I was there in November they had already all left.

The birds are oblivious to the planes flying overhead and to practice firing ashore and have been quite unaffected by any defense operations. It is gratifying to find that Admiral Nimitz' order to his personnel not to disturb bird sanctuaries if it could be avoided in the war effort, has been strictly adhered to on Moku Manu. There seems every prospect that the almost connected pair of islands of Moku Manu can be kept in their primeval condition and that more species may come to nest there, as the Christmas shearwater and gray tern seem to be doing. It would be wonderful if the white and the Necker Island tern would come there. Both are as near as Kaula off the island of Niihau where Mr. Caum saw them in 1932. One splendid feature of Moku Manu is the very light mortality in birds there.

A good series of pictures were taken, including Dr. Emory showing how to catch sea birds on the wing with a stone on the end of a string.

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SHOOTING OF WILD DUCKS. We have received a letter from Mr. Colin Lennox, President of the Board of Agriculture and Forestry, concerning the note on this subject in the last issue of Elepaio. He writes "The only permits which have been issued to shoot wild ducks in the Waipio Valley on the island of Hawaii are where the ducks were pulling up the newly planted taro. The first day that shooting was done here the ducks left the area and have never returned. No other shooting of ducks has been permitted. In a few cases where owners have claimed of damage to young fish we have sent our wardens out to scare them off with a few shots. The publicity which this action has received is out of proportion to the amount of actual shooting done. We have issued many permits to shoot pheasants on farm lands and this will be continued as these birds are causing considerable damage. - - - This Board is very interested in fostering the bird life of the Territory and is doing all in its power to do so providing the birds are not materially damaging the food crops needed by man. We are glad to have your interest in this general problem and will appreciate suggestions from you at any time."

Mr. Lennox enclosed a copy of the arrangement under which a permit may be issued. The requirements are stringent and if properly observed should allow no unnecessary shooting. The concluding paragraph reads, "The issuance of permits to shoot pheasants is not to be construed in any way as a relaxation of Regulation 9 calling for a closed season on all birds. - - Special care should be used in enforcing that regulation in Forest Reserve areas, on pasture lands, canefields, pineapple fields and other areas where the birds may be driven to by the shooting on farm areas, as these areas will become a sanctuary where the birds can multiply without jeopardy to the food production program in Hawaii".

Several members have said that they enjoy reading extracts from letters from the boys who have gone down south. Here is one from Staff Sergeant Harold LeRoy Wilson of the Marines, who left here recently. "The bird life here nearly drives me crazy. I woke up the first morning very early and I thought I must surely be in the ornithologists' heaven. The songs were a jumbled din. Prominent in the front ranks was our old friend the mynah. There the recognition stopped. Its a lost feeling to be among so many I don't know. A purple, yellow, red and green parrot makes the most noise. I never thought about a parrot's natural food before and flowers and blossoms off a mountain apple like tree seems to satisfy them. A honey eater with a white cheek looks like our old friend the amakihi, only duller. They sing and call all day long. They're very hard to find in a coconut palm, they match very well. They are curious, I've had them inspect me at three feet.

A little brown gnatcatcher is a pretty fellow, white and black lines running through his eye and across his head. A short tailed green brown and white pigeon feeds on the ground all through the woods and a large brown dove, almost like the Chinese back there, stays in the trees. I've seen wild jungle fowl with a tail about three feet long and two kinds of rails and a black coot with a red face. I've only seen one small hawk, he was wild and fast so I don't know much about him. There is a yellow white-eye that travels in flocks, I hope to see more of him tomorrow. I'M going on an all day hike early in the morning. I haven't done a bit of painting yet but I intend to just as soon as I have some time."

To-day (December 14th) we received another letter from Lee, he is well and writes even more joyously of the birds and his painting. We hope to give extracts in the next issue.

Here is another letter from Harold Cantlin, U.S. Navy, who is still in the Islands. "I enjoyed our trip to the fish ponds to such an extent on November 13th that I decided I would return there on my next liberty and do a bit of observing on my own. On November 15th I went back and had a very interesting time with my new acquaintances, the stilts, plovers and tattlers.

The day was somewhat cloudy and several very short showers made me doubtful whether it was wise to try any hiking around but I finally decided to look around the ponds anyhow.

To the ocean side of the road the stilts were dabbling in the shallow water and I managed to count 63 before a train came by and all 63 flew too far away for good observation.

I then went to the pond that the group visited on their Saturday afternoon trip. I walked along the beach-like area near the ponds and came upon 6 plover all very near each other, probing for food among the stones. Of course, my white uniform did not help camouflaging me so that they soon took flight, giving their typical call. To the northern part of the pond in a small wet area I got my first real good look at the tattler. He soon became accustomed to my presence and went on feeding. I chose the best place to watch him and then the little fellow put on a real show. Apparently he was looking for small fish as he would suddenly break into a run and appear to be in close pursuit of a fish. The water varied from  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch to 2 inches deep and in the process of running several times the bird would come to a deep spot and the results were quite humorous. It would immediately scamper back to more shallow water and continue its search. I noted that this bird has the familiar teeter of the sandpiper family. It was not as evident in this species as in many North American species of sandpipers, but it did have a definite bobbing motion when it

walked. I could easily see the faint white line above its eye and the yellowish legs with the gray plumage that identify this bird.

I should say, however, that the bird of the day was the pintail duck. After counting twice I arrived at the total of 366 birds. The pond was covered with the ducks, many of which were feeding in the characteristic manner of the surface feeding ducks; that is by just turning their tails up and feeding from the shallow bottom without diving. I was surprised while making my count of the pintails that there should appear amongst the other ducks one single bufflehead female. The white spot on its black face was very distinctive but I was somewhat disappointed in not seeing the male of the species. It seems odd that the one female should be the only representative in that large group of ducks.

There were 65 more stilts on this pond also, making a total of 128 seen that day. Among other birds I observed that day were: 2 adult and 1 immature black-crowned night herons, 6 gallinules, 10 coots, 1 white-eye, 2 cardinals and many mynahs and doves.

While observing the tattler and its adventures in running into the deep water brought up the question in my mind - can birds of the sandpiper swim? I have never seen an adult bird swim but I have definitely seen the young of the spotted sandpiper take to water with the agility of a duck. I was walking down a beach at home when I came upon three very young sandpipers. They immediately scampered into the water and swam at least 20 feet out. The adult bird flew very close to me trying to drive me away so that I was sure of my identification. Maybe you can tell me the answer to that question."

We are glad to use this interesting letter from Harold Cantlin, who is making good use of his liberty by following his hobby of bird watching wherever he goes. In reply to his question, there is little doubt that most of the sandpipers and also plovers can swim. They very seldom do so, since they are not built for swimming. They are not web-footed and have long legs and bills which fit them for picking up their food along the margins of lakes and rivers and on mudflats. When they wish to escape from their enemies they fly, and all are exceptionally strong fliers. Before the young are able to fly they escape by swimming. Since most of their enemies are land animals that is the best way for them.

#### BIRD WALK

Our last bird walk on December 11th was taken at the home of Lorin Gill on Tantalus. Going into the tropical valley we saw first an elepaio and an English sparrow. After a wait of perhaps twenty minutes we heard the first hill robins. It wasn't long before we saw them flitting through the nearby trees.

A few minutes later two robins gave us quite a show by batheing and splashing vociferously in the fish pond. For most of the members it was the first time that they had seen the robin at such close range.

Later, strolling along a forest trail, we heard a few birds but saw none. On our return to the house, however, we were confronted by approximately thirty or forty robins flitting about in a large Rose of Sharon tree. Sitting side by side were two robins which especially amused us. They were twittering and rubbing their bills together much in the fashion of love birds.

As we were leaving we were offered limes and avocado pears from trees in the garden.

I would like to invite members of the Audubon Society to come to our valley on Tantalus at any time to study the hill robins.

Next walk: meet 2.00 p.m. January 15th, Punahou & Nehoa. Lorin Gill