



David Douglas and the Original Description of the Hawaiian Goose

Storrs L. Olson

All modern references to the supposed original description of the Nene or Hawaiian Goose (*Branta sandvicensis*) are doubly erroneous. Furthermore, it is a little appreciated fact that the specimens upon which the scientific name was based were sent to England by none other than David Douglas (he of the Douglas Fir), one of the more illustrious early naturalists to visit the Hawaiian Islands, and who met a grisly and enigmatic death on the island of Hawaii in 1834 (Harvey 1947, McKelvey 1955, Morwood 1973, Davies 1980). Although Douglas is renowned for his botanical explorations of the American West, where he also collected and described birds, there appears to be no other connection between Douglas and the ornithological history of Hawaii. I therefore review here the literature concerning the proper original citation for the Nene and Douglas' association with it.

Although "geese... not unlike the Chinese geese... called Nana" were recorded on the island of Hawaii at the time of Captain Cook's discovery of the archipelago in 1778 (Ellis 1782, quoted in Medway 1981), it was not until much later that the Hawaiian Goose was provided with a scientific name. Rothschild (1900) appears to be the only author, however, who gives the correct citation for the species. Most others, beginning at least with Wilson and Evans (1893:187), have cited the name *Anser sandvicensis* Vigors as dating from a list of animals in the gardens of the Zoological Society of London published in June 1833. Although this was the 11th edition of this list, Peters (1931) mistakenly cites it as the 3rd edition, in which error he has been followed by all modern authorities (e.g., Delacour 1954, Wagstaffe 1978, Johnsgard 1979, American Ornithologists' Union 1983), so that we may doubt that any compiler in this century has taken the trouble to consult the actual reference, which reads as follows:

SANDWICH ISLAND GOOSE

Anser Sandvicensis, Vigors.

A pair of these birds, which appear to be hitherto undescribed, was presented to the Society by Lady Glengall. (Vigors 1833a:4)

At this point, the name is an absolute *nomen nudum*, with no nomenclatural standing whatever. The next appearance of the name is likewise an absolute *nomen nudum*:

A specimen was exhibited of a *Goose* from the Sandwich Islands, being one of a pair recently living at the

Society's Gardens, to which they were presented by Lady Glengall. Mr. Vigors characterized it as a species of *Barnacle Goose*, by the name of *Bernicla Sandvicensis*, and pointed out its distinguishing marks. He also observed on the general resemblance in the distribution of colouring which occurs in the species of *Bernicla* and in those of many other groups of *Birds*. (Vigors 1833b:65)

Although the specimen could well have been exhibited alive, the wording "recently living" implicitly suggests that it was already dead by 11 June 1833, when the notice was read. Not until 1834 did there appear an actual description to accompany Vigors' name. This was part of a rather long communication that began:

A specimen was exhibited of the young of the *Sandwich Island Goose*, *Bernicla Sandvicensis*, Vig., which was hatched at Knowsley. It was accompanied by the following note from the President, Lord Stanley.

"Through the kindness of John Reeves, Esq., I received at Knowsley a pair of these birds on the 15th of February, 1834." (Stanley 1834:43)

This preceded five paragraphs, all in quotes, from Lord Stanley regarding the breeding of the species in captivity, no portion of which can be said to constitute a description of any sort, apart from a reference to "its Quaker-like simplicity of plumage" (Stanley 1834:43). To Stanley's account is then added a *bona fide* description:

The bird in question was named by Mr. Vigors at the Meeting of the Society on June 11, 1833. It may be characterized as follows:

Bernicla Sandvicensis. *Bern. brunneo-nigrescens*, *subtus marginibusque plumarum pallidioribus; collo albescenti; gula, facie, capite supernè, lineâque longitudinali nuchali nigris; crisso albo.*

Long. tot. 24 unc., *rostri*, rictus 1½; *alae*, 13¾; *caudae*, 5; *tarsi*, 2¾.

Hab. in insulis Sandvicensibus et in Owyhee. (Vigors 1834:43)

BRANTA SANDVICENSIS

Branta sandvicensis (Vigors)

Bernicla sandvicensis Vigors, 1834, Proc. Zool. Soc. London, 1834, p. 43—Sandwich Islands and Owyhee [= island of Hawaii].

With regard to the type material, Vigors' (1834) description had to be based on the specimen exhibited at the Society's meeting of 11 June (Vigors 1833b), as the only other Hawaiian Geese then in England were presumably Lord Stanley's, which were still alive at Knowsley and would probably not have been seen by Vigors. The holotype has been assumed to be the specimen now in the Liverpool Museum (T12706), where it was received in the first collection of H.B. Tristram, having formerly been in the collection of T.C. Eyton (no. 4270), who in turn had received it from the museum of the Zoological Society (Wagstaffe 1978:5). The fate of the second member of the original pair at the Zoological Society is unknown. Another old specimen at Liverpool (D890) may have been "one of the birds received by Lord Stanley in February 1834 or its descendant" but there is no helpful documentation on this point (M. Largen, *in litt.* 1 February 1988). It would have no status as a type in any case.

That David Douglas supplied the original pair of *Branta sandvicensis* we know only from the narrative of a whaling voyage around the world by F.D. Bennett (1840), himself an accomplished naturalist, in which he mentions that:

The Sandwich Island goose (*Bernicla Sandvicensis*, Vigors.) . . . has been recently described from a living pair of these birds sent to England by the late enterprising traveller, Mr. D. Douglas, and presented, by Lady Glengall, to the London Zoological Society. (Bennett 1840:251)

David Douglas is known to have visited the Hawaiian Islands on at least three occasions, the first, which is often overlooked, was a stopover in Honolulu in the ship *Eagle* after departing England 31 October 1829 on his return to the Columbia River, where he arrived on 3 June 1830 (Davies 1980:154). His second visit was in 1832, and his third and final sojourn in the archipelago began 23 December 1833 and ended with his death on the island of Hawaii on 12 July 1834. The last visit began long after the geese he sent had arrived in England, so it is the second visit that concerns us. For this, Harvey (1947) has Douglas arriving on 7 September and departing on 12 September 1832, and McKelvey (1955) also inferred his arrival as 7 September. Judd and Lind (1974) put Douglas' arrival in Honolulu in August, and Davies (1980:154) has him staying for three weeks. His stay in Honolulu must have been quite short in any case, for he arrived at Fort Vancouver by mid-October 1832 (Morwood 1973:192).

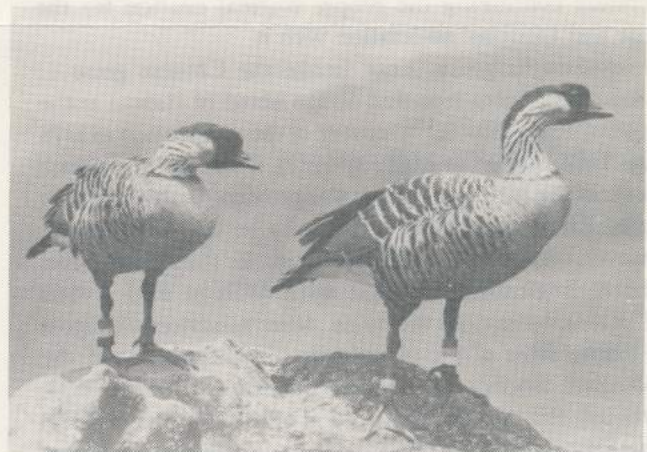
During this brief time he was preoccupied with packing and shipping his California collections.

From the Sandwich Islands, I shipped on board the *Sarah and Elizabeth*, a South-Seaman of London, and bound for that port, nineteen large bundles of dried plants, in two chests, together with seeds, specimens of timber, &c. (Douglas, in McKelvey 1955:408)

Although no geese are mentioned, they must have been included in the "&c" because the *Sara and Elizabeth* departed on 11 September 1832 (Judd and Lind 1974:24) and the geese arrived in London in or before June 1833, when they were exhibited at the Zoological Society's gardens (Vigors 1833a). To dispatch them so shortly after his arrival, Douglas would have had to obtain the geese from some other party who already had them in captivity in Honolulu. This obscure and incidental gesture remains the only link between Hawaiian ornithology and one of the truly great and tragic figures in the annals of natural history.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to M. Ralph Browning for introducing me to some of the literature concerning David Douglas; to Malcolm Largen, Keeper of Vertebrate Zoology, Liverpool Museum, for access to the collections there and for information; to Helen F. James for additional specimen data; and to the staff of the Smithsonian Institution Libraries, especially Leslie Overstreet, for bibliographic assistance.



Nene - *Branta Sandvicensis* (Vigors)

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'ELEPAIO SCIENTIFIC EDITOR ACCEPTS POSITION WITH HAWAIIAN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROJECT

'Elepaio Scientific Editor, Sheila Conant, Ph.D., has accepted the position of principal investigator for the 'Ohi'a Project. The position was left vacant with the untimely death of Dr. Wayne Gagne. The 'Ohi'a Project is a cooperative effort involving the Hawai'i State Department of Education, Moanalua Gardens Foundation, B.P. Bishop Museum, Hawai'i Nature Center, Honolulu Zoo, Ho'omaluhia Botanic Garden, Waikiki Aquarium and the University of Hawai'i to develop environmental education curriculum materials specific to Hawai'i. The project is funded by a grant to the B.P. Bishop Museum from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation of Chicago.

Dr. Conant is an associate professor in the Department of General Sciences at the University of Hawai'i, Manoa campus. Congratulations and best wishes to the 'Ohi'a Project, Dr. Conant is a dynamic addition to the project.

WELCOME TO NEW LOCAL MEMBERS

We welcome the following new local members and encourage them to participate in the Society's activities.

J. Kirk Alexander, Columbus, OH; Daryl Arakaki, Wahiawa, HI; Doris Beinhart, Kapaa, HI; Frank Brandt, San Francisco, CA; Chris Chesne, Boulder, CO; Eugene Donaldson, East Walpole, MA; Lauren Faulkner, Kaneohe, HI; Cladius Feger, White Plains, NY; Helen Funaki, Honolulu, HI; Joann Greenfeld, Kualapuu, HI; Rebecca M. K. Greenway, Mililani, HI; Gail Griffin, Pearl Harbor, HI; Daniel Kahane, Los Angeles, CA; Thomas Kaiakapu, Honolulu, HI; Laura Koenig, Hilo, HI; Edwin Laak, Palo Alto, CA; Suzanne Lauer, Hilo, HI; Cathy Lowder, Hilo, HI; Robert Lupton, Honolulu, HI; Cecelia Pritchard, Concord, CA; Laura Richman, Hilo, HI; Marilyn Rogosin, Boston, MA; Lyn Scanlon, Honolulu, HI; Mark Sheldon, Kihei, HI; Richard Soehren, Sacramento, CA; Arthur Solomon, Kailua, HI; Chelsea Wallis, Kamuela, HI; Henry Wilkens, Princeville, HI; Cheryl Woodard, Berkeley, CA; Lauren Yamane, Honolulu, HI.

HAS AUGUST PROGRAM

Dr. John Bardach will speak on "Climate Change Uncertainties" on Monday, August 21 at 7:30 PM at B.P. Bishop Museum Atherton Halau. Dr. Bardach is internationally recognized for his work in fisheries and aquaculture. Most recently he has become involved with issues relating to global climate change and it's ecological consequences.

NAS WILDLIFE SANCTUARIES INTERN PROGRAM

The NAS Science and Sanctuaries Division maintains over 100 sanctuaries, totaling more than 130,000 acres of protected habitat. Eight of these sanctuaries have public visitation programs or other personnel needs sufficient to warrant the establishment of intern programs. Intern duties include resource management, natural history interpretation,

research, and fund raising. The overall purpose of these activities is to benefit the sanctuary and its resources. Each sanctuary has different needs, the intern program was created to help individual sanctuaries meet their personnel needs and to provide interns with hands-on experience. Benefits include optional college credits, housing, utilities, uniforms, stipends, and eligibility for John H. Baker Scholarship Fund for Conservation Education. Interns are responsible for food, insurance and travel costs. For more information, write to the sanctuary manager of the individual sanctuary. Sanctuaries and addresses are listed below.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- August 14 (Mon.) Board Meeting at HAS office at
7:00 PM . Call Bruce Eilerts for
details, 599-4795
- August 21 (Mon.) General Meeting at Atherton
Halau, Bishop Museum at 7:30 PM.
Program: Climate Change Uncertainties
by Dr. John Bardach.

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