

THE ELEPAIO

Journal of the HONOLULU AUDUBON SOCIETY

For the Better Protection of Wildlife in Hawaii

Volume 5 Number 1

July 1944

A BIRDING TRIP TO TULAGI

by

Walter Donaghho

Feb. 4, 1943: At last I was finally on my way to Tulagi. The little tramp steamer was now slowly steaming its way from the distant shores of Guadalcanal, the coco palms of which were now dropping below the horizon. We were approaching the green mysterious shores of Florida Island, looming up dead ahead. As we approached, the green jungle-covered hills and headlands of the island became more distinct. I could soon discern the rocky summit of the little island of Tulagi in the foreground, with white houses perched here and there among the verdure. There were many bare red patches, presumably the results of the intense shelling that the island suffered not so long ago. The sun slowly sank as we crept up, and in the failing light we rounded the three small jungle-covered islets off the near end of the island and crept in darkness up the shores to the dock.

I had a pleasant night's rest on the deck, except for a squall that swept across the harbor, forcing me to evacuate to drier quarters on one of the messhall tables to finish my slumbers. Day broke quietly over the harbor, and one by one the features of the shell-torn island, its white houses, roofed with red corrugated iron, scattered here and there among its hills, and the jungle-clad, tumbled-down hills of the mainland, became distinct. A rooster crowed (first heard since I arrived in the Solomons Dec. 17, 1942) from somewhere on shore. Sweet notes of, at that time, a strange bird floated out to me from the shore. I later learned that this was a fan-tail flycatcher, or Willie Wagtail. Though similar to the Guadalcanal bird its song was mellow.

The harbor was an excellent one. Well sheltered, it afforded good anchorage for ocean craft. Across to the northeast, near the mainland, was Makambo Island. Up the coast, to the east, I could see Gavutu and Tanambongo islets, famous as great battlefields, and scene of the first flag raising by U.S. troops on captured soil in this war. These islets were completely bomb torn, all the vegetation shot away.

I got off the steamer and went off to see what the island had to offer. Tulagi is a long narrow island, two miles or so in length, and it is hilly, with a backbone ridge averaging two hundred feet in height. Toward the west end this increases to three hundred feet.

I followed a white coral-paved road which led straight back into the island, through a cut in the hill. Coming out of the cut I passed along the edge of the large cricket field. Here was the scene of a great battle for the island. The field was the beginning of a flat point of land jutting out from the hills. The Marines landed here in force and pushed the Japs back against the hills and black bluffs around the north side of the flat. They were evicted only after much bloodshed.

I walked on through a sparse coconut grove to the beach. I could very well see that this was formerly a beautiful grove, but now there were many trees without tops, having been lopped off by high explosives.

Red-eyed black cooie birds called from the crowns of the palms, where they had built their nests in among the dead frond stumps. Some of them nested in holes in the sides. A blue kingfisher squeaked. Reaching the beach, I turned west and followed the road which led up through an avenue of kamani trees. A golden plover flew up from the beach nearby, followed by a sandpiper that uttered a high shrill note as he flew. After following the graceful curve of the sand beach, the road went on around a rocky headland. Then came another and smaller beach, and another headland. I got a beautiful view of the western end of the island, which was clad in dense jungle. No fighting had taken place here. I now passed through a veritable garden, as the road wound in and out of small vales, all clad in luxuriant verdure. At times I could hear pigeons cooing, but couldn't see them. I had a desire to climb on of the ridges and get into the forest to find out what birdlife the island had to offer. I found a small trail, climbed up the bank and started up the ridge. The forest became more open after a bit, with many myrtle (?) trees growing about. Birds became very common and evident. Fruit pigeons cooed everywhere. I saw a company of them fly into a large tree and through my glasses saw the blood-colored spot on their breasts, the distinguishing feature of the Lewis' fruit pigeon. The rest of the bird was a beautiful metallic green. I also got a brief glimpse of a Solomon fruit pigeon as it flew overhead, recognising it by the broad yellow bars across the breast. A New Ireland fruit pigeon uttered its crow-like "wow" from the depths of the valley beyond. The myrtles were full of a small yellow-green yellow-headed bird that fed upon the orange blossoms. They were very cheery, uttering a pleasant warbling note as they went about their business. Several dark colored and small birds were flying about, they may have been the Solomon representatives of zosterops, or the white-eye. I have not seen any birds yet that I would call white-eyes, though I know they are supposed to be here. The bird in question is a deep smoky blue black, with a dirty white breast. Immediately under the bill is a yellow patch, followed by a larger spot of vermilion. Like the white-eyes, they utter a twitter, but it resembles the crackling of small twigs. The bill is sharp pointed, as in the white-eye.

Parrots were all about. Familiar red lorries, and the large green orange-billed lory that I also had met on Guadalcanal. Accompanied by a great racket that only a parrot can make, a small flock of small green parrots flew into a tree nearby where they commenced to feed on the fruit. The males had yellow heads, by which I recognised them as yellow-headed parrots. At one time a beautiful red polly sailed overhead and down into the glen below. (I have learned since that this was a male of the green, orange-billed lory. At least, I would suppose it was the male, being the most beautiful sex. However, if it is, then it is the male of this species that sits on the nest!)

A couple of shrikes flew out of a tree and landed nearby. They were handsome birds, clean white breasts and pearl grey wings and backs. A company of black birds with long tails flew into the same tree. They were a shiny black with a rich green and purple sheen, and had red eyes. (These were also cooie birds, I believe, but they nested in colonies, building hanging nests of grass, in the manner of orioles)

I scared up several cockatoos that flew about, calling loudly with a harsh "a-a, a-a". A large birdwinged butterfly flew lazily about as I crossed an open area and plunged into a thick stand of jungle that crowned the summit. Myiagra flycatchers were whistling as I reached the top of the ridge. I called, and several flew up around me. I saw one launch into the air and whistle as he flew. It was a pretty sight as he fluttered his wings and braked with his tail as he trembled out his "swe-e-et", then a downward glide and he would brake

again and flutter and tremble as he emitted another. He also levelled off and reared up his head as he whistled. The female has the same notes as the male, and a whistled imitation would bring both. In my opinion, the female is by far the cuter, with her grey head, bright golden brown upperparts and her light brown breast.

I continued along the top of the island, going toward the western end. Bird life was not common, apparently all down in the valleys. The views of the harbor were excellent; sapphire blue water, emerald green hills of Florida Island, and the brilliant sky with white fleecy clouds, all merged to the most beauteous advantages. At the head of a little cove, and peeking shyly out from behind a cluster of coco palms was a cluster of thatched huts of a native village.

After scrambling over a rough and rocky terrain, the trail zigzagged down into a dense and high stand of timber that clothed a deep gap in the main ridge. Here I came across a trail and turned north, descending toward the harbor. I came out on a cobbled path that followed the shore along just behind a mangrove swamp that hugged the shore of the island there. At that point the north side of the island is steep, and is not cut by valleys as is the south side. Bird life was scarce. Once I heard a strange loud plaintive note that resembled something that a bird of paradise would utter. Now there are no birds of paradise in the Solomons (at least I saw none), but I wondered, as I stalked the strange bird, what I would see. It called again and again as I groped my way up the hillside. Finally I was under it. It called again and I thrilled with wondrous expectations as a large black bird flew out. But oh, what a let down. When it landed it turned out to be a true mynah!

Soon I came upon the road into the village, and my bird walk thus came to a delightful end.

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Strange Action of a Kentucky Cardinal

A few years ago a neighbor asked me why a cardinal flew against the window panes. It did not occur to me then that the bird made a practice of this. Recently, however, for several weeks I have been puzzled by a strange plunking sound which I thought emanated from a neighbor's place. Eventually, towards the latter part of February this year, I found that it was a male cardinal flying against the top panes of the end windows of my inner office. There are three window panes, 48 x 27 inches, screened, and a small fixed pane 27 x 10 inches at the top, without screen. The large panes are half open and the screens closed. The bird sits on the top of the frame of the window about 12 to 18 inches away from the top pane and flies against it. It comes at intervals during the day and strikes the glass with a good thud from one to eight times or more, sometimes giving it two strokes in one flight. It appears to strike the pane with the top of its beak. It does not seem to hurt itself in any way. I sometimes stand quite close to it while it flies at the window. Sometimes it goes from one window to another along the whole row taking a few turns at each. After striking the window a few times it flies off but returns. Some days it returns quite often at others at longer intervals but I think it comes every day. It evidently obtains pleasure from striking the pane and seems quite fascinated with the act.

Its mate probably has a nest in the vicinity as one sings early in the morning. One comes to feed on bread crumbs on the lawn occasionally, but I am not sure it is the same one as strikes the window. I heard it about a month before I found what it was and it has continued ever since till now at the end of April.

George C. Munro

Most male song birds at the start of the breeding season occupy a certain area and, having won a mate, proceed to keep this "territory" free from all trespassers. Their fighting spirit is very strong, their fury is such that a trespasser usually flees headlong without argument.

No doubt Mr. Munro's cardinal saw his own reflection in the window pane and thought it was another cardinal. He at once attacked it in order to drive it away, the strength and blindness of the urge to attack is shown by the bird not learning its mistake, even over a period of three months.

Windows give a good reflection and are often attacked, the birds will even dash themselves against the bright hubcaps of automobiles.

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J.d'A.N.

SUMMARY OF LAWS, REGULATIONS AND ORDINANCES RELATING TO BIRDS

The Revised Laws of Hawaii 1935 and subsequent amendments by the Territorial Legislature are those at present in effect. Since these comprise eight type-written pages it will probably be easier for the average person to consult this summary. References are given to the original law; R.L.H means Revised Laws of Hawaii; S.L.H., Session Laws of Hawaii; Board means the Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry.

All further hunting of game birds was suspended by regulation of the Board in October 1942 and there is also an ordinance prohibiting the use of slingshots and air-rifles for shooting birds within the city and county of Honolulu. (Revised Ordinances of Honolulu 1942, Sec. 1072.)

All perching birds frequenting the forests, except the house sparrow, house finch and rice bird, are considered beneficial and are protected. (R.L.H.1935, Sec. 306; S.L.H.1937, Act 199, Sec.6,7.)

Collection of birds for scientific purposes is allowed, under permit. (R.L.H.1935, Sec.310-313.)

All turkeys, pheasants, quail, peafowl, geese or chickens running wild belong to the owner of the land and it shall not be lawful for anyone to hunt thereon for any kind of animal or game without permission of the owner. (R.L.H.1935, Sec.315,316.)

No hunting for birds or animals is allowed from aircraft. (R.L.H. 1935, Sec.6986.)

The Session Laws of Hawaii 1937 considerably amended the previous Revised Laws of Hawaii 1935.

Open seasons were declared on cock pheasants from November 1 to January 3; on migratory wild duck from November 1 to February 28; on quail from November 1 to December 1; on plover, snipe, turnstone, curlew, stilt and mudhen from March 1 to May 15; on wild doves, wild pigeons and bar-shouldered doves from September 1 to December 31. The Board was authorized to reduce open seasons and bag limits. (S.L.H. 1937, Act 199, Sec.1.)

It is unlawful to kill any native wild duck, native wild goose (nene), migratory wild duck, migratory non-game gull, migratory non-game tern, plover, snipe, turnstone, curlew, stilt, mudhen, pheasant, quail, partridge, wild guinea fowl, wild dove or wild pigeon, wild peacock or any new game birds unless during an open season designated by the Board or territorial law. (S.L.H.1937, Act 199, Sec2.)

It is unlawful for any person to shoot, snare, capture, hold in captivity, sell or offer for sale any wild introduced bird or the progeny of such bird. The house sparrow, house finch and rice bird are not protected. Any one found with a trap, snare, net or other device for taking birds or is found with a light at night searching for roosting birds is guilty by prima facie evidence. (S.L.H.1937, Act 118, Sec.1,2; Act 199, Sec.4.)

The Board may declare certain birds to be common nuisances and allow their destruction. (S.L.H.1937, Act 199, Sec.5.)

The Board shall regulate the protection of bird, animal and vegetable life on the islands of Moku Manu, Moku Lua, Popoia, Manana, Kaohikaipu, Mokuhooniki and Kapapa. (R.L.H.1935, Sec.410.)

One half of the fine imposed and collected in cases of conviction shall be paid to the person giving the information. (R.L.H.1935, Sec. 405.)

In cases where immediate action is necessary, such as deliberate shooting of birds, it would be best to call the Police Dept. and give the information. The police have always been prompt to reply to any call and we have Chief Gabrielson's assurance that he will cooperate fully.

Where birds are being trapped or offered for sale illegally call an officer of this Society, the Hui Manu or the Humane Society for advice.

J.d'A.N.

A recent issue of the station newspaper on Midway carried this plea to personnel concerning the gooneys, as the albatrosses are known to most sailors.

"Every year thousands of these lovable birds are killed unavoidably. The gooneys are very senseless to danger from vehicles, aircraft and automobiles alike. They are, in fact, quite disdainful of the hurrying motorist. Therefore, it is up to everybody to look out for the gooneys when they have decided that the middle of the road will be a good place to sleep. The gooneys are the best entertainment we have on this island. Let's protect them to the best of our ability."

Next bird walk: meet Punahou and Nehoa, July 15th., 2.00 p.m.

HONOLULU AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Dues \$1.00 a year