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Protection for Hawaiian Shore Birds

By George C. Munro

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It has been a great disappointment to me to find a seeming lack of interest or sentiment on the part of the young people of these Islands toward the wild life of ancient Hawaii. One might expect this to be very strong in the descendants of the early pioneers and even of others born of more recent arrivals.

How fine it would be if at this stage the influential descendants of our early people would take an enthusiastic interest in the preservation and perpetuation of the wild life of their Island home. Their support would go a long way toward influencing the Board of Agriculture and Forestry in the direction of measures for preservation of the native shore birds instead of having them kept in the list of game birds to be menaced by complete destruction. The Board of Agriculture and Forestry which also functions as the Fish and Game Commission is rightly expected to be the best posted on native conditions connected with the welfare of agriculture, forestry and game, and to take the most effective measures for the best interests of the country at large. If those interested, especially the old residents, will not make their wishes known to bureaus or commissions appointed to serve the public welfare, these institutions cannot be blamed for working in accord with those who trouble to do so. In this case it is the opponents of protection who are apparently the most vocal.

For a long time, but particularly during last year, I and others have spared no effort to encourage open expressions of sentiment in favor of protection of the shore waterfowl and migratory birds, particularly the plover, but with few results. The principal reason for this is that some of those who have been shooting the plover are reluctant to see them removed from the list of game birds and use all their influence to have shooting privileges retained. Their friends, even if convinced that the birds need protection, do not care to oppose them. And the apathy of the public allows this small band of plover shooters to carry the day, and with the plover, the other waders, even those threatened with extinction, are neglected and carried on the game list. In other countries conservation sentiment is strong and good work is being done to ensure proper measures for perpetuation of the native birds.

Is there any reason why Hawaii should lag behind in this, especially as we pride ourselves on the measures we take for progress in other fields? In avian care we certainly have lagged. True, for senti-

mental and scientific reasons former President Theodore Roosevelt declared Laysan and other islands to be bird sanctuaries. But so little care was taken of them that Laysan from being a unique bird paradise, was rendered a desert by rabbits and some of the birds exterminated. We protected our forest birds for commercial reasons but allowed these birds to dwindle away with little care or study. We shot for sport or the table our wonderful goose until it was nearly exterminated. It took us more than forty years to recognize the value of the mynah bird to agriculture as an insect destroyer and to protect it. We are now allowing unique endemic birds to approach extinction which for scientific and sentimental reasons should be indefinitely preserved, and are making practically no effort to save them. And lastly, we are allowing the Kolea, the native plover which is of the greatest value to agriculture, to be so reduced as to greatly detract from its value to economic interests. If we persist in this short-sighted policy in this englightened age, we will with justice in the future be alluded to as one of the horrible examples of selfish exploitation.

Dr. R. C. L. Perkins on whom scientific societies in other countries have conferred many honors, was engaged in investigation of the land fauna of the Hawaiian Islands for twenty-eight years - 1892 to 1920. Numerous works of his have been published on the Hawaiian fauna and on Economic Entomology. Perkins wrote of the Kolea, the Pacific Golden Plover (Pluvialis dominica fulva) in 1902 in "Fauna Hawaiiensis" Volume I, Part IV, "Vertebrata", under "Aves," page 449. I shall quote him at length as I, from close personal association, know his work to have been very thorough and the subject is such an important one.

"In many parts of the Islands large numbers of the Kolea and Akekeke habitually resort to the margin of the sea, and the extensive mudflats for feeding purposes, but the greater part scatter over the low-lying grass lands and the open mountain country, where they may be found even as high as five or six thousand feet above the sea. In such localities they find abundant food in the caterpillars of various noctuid moths and indeed in the moths themselves. Of all the island birds, the Kolea is the most valuable to the grazier and the agriculturalist, and it is singularly unfortunate that is is a most excellent bird for the table and at the same time the most generally sought after by sportsmen.

"I have been at some pains to learn exactly the species of Noctuedae which form the principal food of the plover, whether as moth or caterpillar and I have several times shot the bird at the instant that it has seized a moth in its hiding place at the roots of the grass. I am therefore able to state positively that it catches the moth both of (Agrotis crinigera) and (dislocata), the caterpillars of which are the two most extremely injurious and widespread of all island "cutworms". It also obtains the caterpillars of both these and other species, and feeds as is well known to an enormous extent on the grass army worm (Spenodoptera), a caterpillar which not only locally entirely clears off the freshly grown grass but also does some damage to the young leaves to sugar cane.

"For these reasons the plover is worthy of all encouragement by the agriculturist and should never be shot on or around his land, or if this is done he should not complain when his crops are ravaged by cutworms, as is too often the case.

"Unfortunately again for the agriculturist the plover, which feed inland, are generally in the habit of repairing at intervals during the day to the ponds so frequently found near the coast, either permanently or temporarily during the rainy season, and it is during these visits that the greater number are shot over decoys. Even the crudest imitation of the bird is sufficient to attract those that come to drink within easy range of the shooter who sits behind a blind. In this manner they are generally shot as they hover and wheel around the decoys at a distance of from ten to twenty yards from the blind, and the execution by even a moderate shot is necessarily considerable, while very heavy bags are frequently made.

"It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that the Kolea is much less numerous than was the case formerly, and it will certainly become still less in the future."

How much more does this advice apply now than thirty-five years ago. The birds as Perkins foretold are terribly reduced in numbers. There are many more young sportsmen than formerly and modern means of transportation brings the gathering places of the plover so much nearer to the gunners. At the present rate of destruction it can not be long before the plover will be a rarity. If allowed to increase, these birds would become an added source of pleasure to the public which can now, with distances eliminated, much more easily avail itself of attractions such as this. The people can enjoy the large wheeling flocks, their cheerful calls and at close range their beautiful plumage, spangled golden backs and black breasts. On sanctuaries the wild birds are unafraid of human beings and in other countries are much enjoyed.

One excuse for shooting this bird is that it will be shot in other places in its migration. The facts are that it is protected at both ends of its flight, in New Zealand and Alaska. Why should we wait to be the la st to protect birds probably more useful to ourselves than to people elsewhere?

To be continued.

Note: It should be remembered that while all hunting is forbidden at present, the ban is a wartime measure, only. The plover and other birds mentioned in Mr. Munro's article are still on the game list, and without doubt pressure will be brought as soon as possible to have hunting resumed. We are very fortunate in our present Board of Agriculture and Forestry, headed by Colin G. Lennox, and we should lay the foundation at this time for a movement to secure revision of the game list.

oOo

The following is part of a Christmas letter from Walter Donaghho, who is now in Madison, Wisconsin.

"This Christmas for me has been a beautiful white Christmas. The ground is glistening white in the sun with nine inches of snow. The air is crisp and cold, with a temperature of five below zero. All the birds have gone South, except for a few, which I see now and then. Yesterday we (I am at my sister's home) were watching a brown creeper and a pair of white breasted nuthatches running down the oaks just outside. There were also a pair of downy woodpeckers and one hairy woodpecker working on the limbs. The other day I saw a red breasted nuthatch.."

A Bird Day in New Zealand
by Walter Donaghho

It wasn't quite time for Ross McKenzie to come after me when I awoke, so I got up and went out to get some glimpses of New Zealand birdlife about a farm. It was a beautiful morning; clear and sunny. The air rang with the sweet melodies of English thrushes and blackbirds. A California linnet sang from a stand of eucalyptus trees across the little pasture and orchard at the back of the house. A pair of Chaffinches feeding in a little garden at the back door flew up as they saw me. I walked through a little gate into the orchard of peach, orange, plum and other fruit trees. Sheep browsed on the grass underneath. The peach and plums were a mass of bloom. Blackbirds and English sparrows were about. A flock of white eyes foraged for nectar among the peach blossoms.

Ross came along presently, and we drove off down the road toward the still sleeping little hamlet of Clevedon. Here we picked up a New Zealand soldier who wanted to go with us. The golden sunbeams played happily over the green countryside and all life was astir. Skylarks flew up along the roadside as we passed, and Ross kept a sharp lookout for pipits. Once he stopped the car and, going over to the grassy bank at the edge of the road, parted the grass. Deep down in was the grass lined nest of a pipit. We proceeded down the Clevedon Valley and turned up another, smaller valley, the Ness Valley. After a bit, we turned in at his farm. After a ham and egg breakfast, he fetched his outboard motor and a can of "benzene", as gas is known to the New Zealander, and we drove off again.

Driving on down the Clevedon Valley, we came presently out on the wide estuary. Ross stopped the car, and peered out over the extensive mud flats, trying to catch a glimpse of a flock of Pacific godwits that fed on the flats. He found them, and we walked across the pasture, then across the mud towards them. A flock of 24 stilt fed in a pond on the mud. Several large Caspian terns fed at the edge of the shallow Clevedon creek where it crossed the mud. As we approached, the godwits flew up from the edge of the flats a hundred yards distant and made off around the point. "Too late!" exclaimed Ross. "They won't be back before night."

A solitary pied shag swam about in a little canal running through the reed marsh. We stopped to watch it dive for fish. A yellowhammer was perched on a fencepole across the road, singing its short "alittlebitofbreadandnocheese!"

After winding in and out of the green hills, we finally climbed a hill, and pulled up at a farmhouse overlooking the ocean. We went through the pastures to the rocky shore. Under the bluffs nearby was Ross' boathouse. In short time we had the boat launched and were put-putting up the shore off the orange clay bluffs. We stopped at a spring to get water, then made out across the channel to Pakihi Island. Ross knew of a spot on this island where reef herons nested. Approaching the high bluffs of the North Point, we kept our eyes fastened to the pohutukaus growing on the sides of the of the cliffs for any possible herons that may be scared off by our approach. A heron flew off the remains of a pier just off the shore and another flew up from the rocky coast.

"My guess is that that heron is nesting on the top of the pier," Ross said, "possibly in that box there", indicating a flat oblong box built on the platform. We proceeded to the beach of a little cove just beyond. Mike (the soldier) and I got out and worked along the cliffs, examining the roots of the pohutukaus for heron nests. We found two, but they were unoccupied.

I wanted to climb up on the pier to examine the box, so Ross rowed over, and when the boat went underneath, I climbed up on the crosspieces and clambered up to the platform. Glancing into the box, I found a large nest of sticks. In the center were two pale green eggs. A discarded egg lay on the boards outside the nest; this I took with me.

Mike and I followed the beach along to the East point of the island, exploring, as we went, among the roots of the trees growing along the beach, for burrows of the little blue penguin. Shags flew up from rocks offshore as we progressed. Now and then a fantail flycatcher flew down to give us a thorough scrutiny. We found no penguins. Ross beached the boat at the point, and we got in and pushed off, crossing the channel to the large Ponui Island. Shags of four species; black, white-fronted, little and big pied, flew about, and Ross was very skillful in identifying them. Several Australian gannets were diving for fish up the channel. Far down the winding channel between the green hills of the mainland and the islands offshore loomed the conical crater of Rangitoto Island, marking the entrance to Auckland Harbor.

Up the channel on the other side of the bay were the distant blue Coromandels. A lightship anchored off a rocky point of Ponui a little way up the channel. Proceeding north along the coast, we pulled into a cove and landed on the sandy beach. Mike and I got out here and started south along the rocky shore, exploring the banks for burrows of the blue penguin and the white faced petrel, as well as the nests of the blue reef heron, while Ross took the boat up to another cove up the coast to wait for us. I looked among the roots of the Pohutukaus for the penguins and peered under tufts of grass for the petrel, but neither did I find. In a narrow crevice were two empty nests of the blue heron. A kingfisher flew up from a rock by the water's edge and disappeared in the cliff above the rocky beach. Reaching the spot, I found, out of reach, several small burrows in the bank. In one of them was the kingfisher.

We came to the cove where Ross waited. Before leaving, we filled a sack with "pipis" or clams dug out of the sand. Then we went over to the point on Pakihi Island where we found a flat iron, built a fireplace, and cooked the clams for our lunch. A pair of red billed gulls alighted on the beach in front of us. They are beautiful birds with their soft grey wings, clean white breast, neck and head, and the lovely red bill and feet. We threw clams to them, and they snatched them up. The beach was of a beautiful red gravel, which seemed to resemble the "beauty clay" of the Rotorua and Orakei regions. Perhaps it is an ancient scene of thermal activity. A pair of gulls out on the point, which was a sand spit jutting far out into the water, were engaged in opening clams, which they carried aloft 15 feet or so, to let them drop to smash open on the rocks below.

After a hearty meal, we got into the boat again and put-putted quickly back to the farm where we had started. While climbing up the hill to the house and car, I noticed a pipit flying up near me. It was

grey, with white marks, and though I wondered whether I would be able to tell it from the skylarks, I found that I had no trouble.

Passing the Clevedon estuary again, we stopped to see if the godwits were back. They were, and with greater numbers. I counted over 325 in the flock.

When we arrived at Ross's home again, we found that there was still a little time to drive up into the mountains, and after putting the motor away, we drove on up the valley. The valley was a beautiful peaceful vale with pastures along the bottom and climbing up on the sides. Kingfishers were numerous, sitting on the telephone wires along the way. We met a flock of sheep being herded down the road by the shepherd on horseback, and his collie. It was a beautiful sight to watch the busy collie as he raced about the flock seeing to it that they kept together and went in the right direction. Now and then he gave a bark of command, ordering a sheep who had ideas of leaving, back into the flock.

The road climbed a ridge dividing the Ness valley from a branch valley, and we climbed up into the forestclad hills. A grand view unfolded itself as we climbed; the beautiful valley below, which we followed with our eyes down the Clevedon valley, that disappeared behind the wooded ridges across from us, then over the high ridges beyond, to the Waitakeri ranges beyond Auckland. Reaching the summit of a gap along the top of the ridge, I got out and went over to look into a heavily forested glen for possible sight of pigeons that I was most anxious to see. I did not wait long. Soon, one shot up high into the air, then it glided down again, to alight on the bough of a tree in plain sight across the valley. Another did the same thing soon after, alighting in a tree just down the slope, giving me a better look. (They seemed to be fond of this flying up and gliding back down and in to their perch, in the manner of the turtle dove. Like the turtle dove, they vigorously beat their wings on the ascent.) We drove up the side of the ridge and parked in an excavation at the side of the road a couple of glens farther on. We hiked out to the ridge and looked down into a heavily forested valley that dropped away into a larger valley below. The sun painted the trees with a rich gold hue, and the night winds began to play around in the forested valleys and wooded ridges. I heard a strange noise, which Ross identified as the cry of a morepork owl. A cute little fantail flycatcher came up out of the bush and gave us a careful examination, much as an elepaio would do. (The fantail is every bit as cute and as tame.) Somewhere in the distance I heard beautiful flutelike notes which Ross identified as a tui. Satisfied with our eyeful, we returned to the car and started down the road again. Several pipits were scared up from the sides of the road as we passed. Reaching Ross's farm, I had dinner, then was taken into Papakura to catch the train in to Auckland, stopping to bid goodbye to the Munro's on the way. (Ross McKenzie is the nephew of George C. Munro; Mr. C. C. Munro is his brother.)

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"The Zoogeographic Position of the Hawaiian Islands." by Ernst Mayr. From "The Condor" (Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of Calif., Berkeley, Calif.), vol.45, pp.45-48, 1944.

Dr. Mayr's paper deals almost entirely with birds. He believes that the native birds of Hawaii (excluding marine species and Laysan)

were derived from only 14 successful colonizations. Of these only two the Elepaio (Chasiempsis) and the honeyeaters (Mono and Chaetoptions) came from Polynesia; the rest, with one or two possible exceptions, originated in northern Asia or North America, chiefly the latter. The same conclusion was reached by Alfred Newton more than fifty years ago, but during the intervening period, as it has become apparent that the plants, insects and most other groups of Hawaiian organisms are of predominantly Polynesian origin, many have come to doubt the evidence concerning the birds. The migratory habits of the latter may explain this difference. The migrants which reach Hawaii at present all nest in North America, as do the species which have occasionally straggled to the islands such as the marsh hawk, osprey and kingfisher.

D. Amadon

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February Bird Walk. For the service man and civilian interested in birds the Oahu bird society offers an opportunity for a look at some real "Hawaiiana" and birds on their monthly bird walk.

February 11th, 10:30 A.M. found us climbing Mt. Tantalus. Equipped with open eyes, listening ears and field glasses, we were rewarded at the very beginning of our walk by a glimpse of the elusive and brilliant Japanese Tit.

It was not long after that we saw the white eye, hill robin, Chinese thrush, and apapane.

The amakihi was definitely recognized by our authority on the trip, Mr. Cogswell, by its distinctive song. Some of us later were more fortunate in seeing the bird.

The individual who wishes to become acquainted with these forest birds must develop an attentive ear, for that is a primary method to indentification. For the most part there will be only a flash of plumage but a great variety of calls and notes.

All along the Tantalus trail, the forest trees and vegetation grow thickly and solidly. Here and there are open areas where one can see far down along the valley and enjoy the pattern of light and dark belts which the sun makes against the range of mountains.

While on the subject of birds and scenery, I might speak of the Gill home, where we stopped on the way back. Situated with Mt. Tantalus as a background, advantage has been taken of the location by building a bird feeding station which the hill robins flock to as regularly as G.I.s do to the call of mail from home. With the birds not more than 25 to 30 feet from the lanai we ended our walk by becoming armchair ornithologists.

Phil Singer

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April Walks: Saturday, April 14th to Alewa Heights. Meet at the corner of Liliha and Wylie Ave at 2:00 P.M.
Sunday, April 22d, to Makiki Valley. Meet at the corner of Punahou and Nehoa at 10:00 A. M.

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