

# THE ELEPAIO

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## The Laysan Albatross on Kauai by George C. Munro

On March 22 I received a letter from Alexandra Knudsen Moir (Mrs. Hector McD. Moir) of Koloa Kauai, telling me that at about 7 P.M. on the 19th she and her husband saw a pair of Laysan albatrosses (*Diomedea immutabilis*) in flight and on the ground, at Makahuena Point, Koloa, Kauai. She wrote: "Their flight was the most thrilling bird flight we had ever seen. There was a high wind blowing and they soared and coasted and rushed past us at a terrific rate of speed, their wing tips literally brushing the tops of the weeds." The birds settled on the ground not more than 30 feet from them. Mrs. Moir described their flight, action on the ground, color and appearance, and their takeoff perfectly. Knowing these birds as I do there is not the slightest doubt about the species. The pair took wing again and Mrs. Moir adds "...they continued their ecstatic flight. We will never forget the magnificence of it." Mr. and Mrs. Moir were fortunate in seeing these beautiful birds at close quarters on the wing and on the ground and I am delighted to have their accurate description of the birds and their action.

This is the first instance I know of the Laysan albatross landing on any of the main group except Niihau. Why did they come to Makahuena Point at this time, toward the end of the breeding season? Did war conditions cause an upset at their former nesting place or were their young destroyed and they were searching for a safer nesting site for next season? Did they have instinctive memories that Makahuena Point was a former albatross nesting place? It undoubtedly was, because Dr. Montague Cooke found sea birds' bones in the sand in that vicinity. After the birds took wing Mr. and Mrs. Moir watched them for half an hour till it was too dark to see them, so they were evidently studying the location. We hope they are satisfied with the site and will return in November, after traversing the North Pacific. If so, every encouragement should be given them to start a new colony at Makahuena Point. The royal albatross, under protection, has done exactly that on the mainland of the South Island of New Zealand.

The pleasure to be derived from the sight of birds within such sanctuary should enlist the active cooperation of the general public as well as all bird lovers in pressing legislation for the local protection of all sea birds. The birds of our seas are under Government protection only on sanctuaries of the Hawaiian Chain. However, the Board of Agriculture and Forestry have the sea birds of the main group under its care and can be depended on to watch over the welfare of such visitors till Government protection can be provided as an additional safeguard.

5-11



Birds Seen on Hawaii  
Pfc. Dean Amadon

These notes made during a recent period of several weeks spent on the "Big Island" are supplemental to the account of a trip to Hawaii National Park that appeared in the March "Elepaio." Except where so stated, observations were made on windward Hawaii along the Hilo and Hamakua coasts. Of introduced birds present on Oahu, the Australian dove, the Brazilian cardinal and the Japanese titmouse were not seen. Ricebirds, mynahs, white eyes and hill robins are common. The hill robin is especially abundant in the extensive areas overgrown with guavas, and may be the greatest in total numbers of any species of bird on Hawaii. House finches, skylarks and Chinese doves are fairly common. This dove was seen in great abundance in an area of coffee plantations and algaroba scrub on the drier Kona coast near Kailua. Skylarks, mynahs and golden plover are common on recently harvested cane fields and in other open areas. I was surprised to find mynahs following grazing Herefords in parts of the Parker ranch miles from habitations. Skylarks were frequently heard giving their flight song. They probably sing more or less throughout the year as does the prairie horned lark in the States.

The Chinese thrush (Trochalopteron) was fairly common, especially along the brushy gullies. In general appearance and habits it reminds me of the brown thrasher. By chance the two have another trait in common: that of repeating phrases of their song. The Chinese thrush is by far the best songster of the two. Its notes have a richness of tone rivaled by only two or three species of bird known to me.

Pheasants were fairly common. Three or four males that I saw all were predominantly of Japanese (green) type. The scolding notes of cocks of this race when flushed seemed to me more strident than those of the ringneck. The latter race occurs and probably interbreeds freely with the Japanese pheasant. Of two cocks I saw in captivity at Kukuihaele that had been trapped by a Filipino, one was a ringneck, the other a Japanese pheasant of mixed blood, with a white collar. While following paths through the cane fields I twice flushed singles and once a pair of quail. Presumably these must have been California quail, but they seemed very small, brownish and silent in flight.

Aside from golden plover, the only water birds noticed were singles of sanderling and tattler on the beach at Kailua, a night heron at the fish pond in the Waipio valley and a pair of white-tailed tropic birds following the coast near Haina landing. Although few birds were seen on my trip to the picturesque Waipio Valley, my keen-eyed companion, Jhino Tohara of Honokaa, pointed out a Hawaiian bat flying along the face of the pali. This was on a dark afternoon. A few weeks later, while on a trip around the island, he showed me another that was hunting after dark about twenty feet above the water along the shore at Kailua. So experienced a Hawaiian naturalist as Perkins believed this bat (lasiurus semotus) comes to the lowlands only when driven by storms. These records were made at sea level in calm weather.

On another day I followed the Upper Hamakua Ditch trail which follows the edge of the deep narrow canyon of the upper Waipio stream and tributaries. Fog or rain envelops this locality much of the time.



The moisture produces a delicate green mantle of ferns and moss on almost vertical cliffs. At first only a sea of fog was visible but it lifted from the bottom of the canyon for a few minutes giving an impressive view, as through a tunnel, of the sunlit beach several miles away. The weather was unfavorable for birds. Only elepaio and amakihi of the native species were seen. A few miles from here I visited a mature plantation of eucalyptus on a steep, wet hillside and was surprised to hear two or three amakihi in this altered habitat. Areas containing some ohia lehua and more suitable for native birds bordered the upper edge of this plantation.

Above Honokaa is a block of forest reserve perhaps one half square mile in area. This contains a stand of large ohia lehua, though the undergrowth is mostly guava with tree ferns restricted to scattered damp spots. Several visits were made but the only native birds encountered were scattered pairs of elepaio and two or three apapane seen or heard. This forest was flanked on the upper borders by grazing land containing a sparse stand of ohia lehua. In some places the trees are dead or dying with no reproduction, but in others they seem to be flourishing and create beautiful park-like glades. Native birds, with the exception of the hawk, were absent. Apapane may range into this area in the flowering season. Lantana is so thick in some places as to ruin them for grazing. This may lead to such areas reverting to forest, assuming that the trees will slowly shade out the lantana.

The Hawaiian hawk or io, which strangely enough, is found only on Hawaii, evidently prefers lightly forested areas. The three I saw were all in the type of ranchland just described. Two of them were flying in a direct course about fifty feet above the tops of the trees. The third I saw on New Year's day, perched on a dead ohia lehua at an elevation of about thirty-five feet. It appeared to be half asleep, sunning itself while balanced on the left foot with the other drawn up and concealed in the feathers. From time to time it would become alert and peer on the ground in all directions, twisting itself far around to look back. Then it half extended and preened its right wing. When I stepped into the open lot in which the hawk **was** perched, it seemed to ignore my approach completely. After examining it at leisure, I whistled and waved my arms without visibly disturbing it. When I pounded the tree with a club, it flipped its wings over its back at the first blow and leaned forward to look down at me, but soon became indifferent. I then threw sticks near it. This failed also, except to cause it to flip its wings nervously again when one **struck** near it. I was becoming ashamed of myself for annoying such an unsuspecting hawk and started to withdraw. For some reason the io now took flight and quickly disappeared above a nearby forest plantation.

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Protection for Hawaiian Shore Birds  
by George C. Munro  
Continued from April issue

It can easily be seen by Perkins' description that plover shooting over decoys and from blinds is not sport in its strict sense.



It has much the appearance of pot shooting. The bird is a table delicacy and in my opinion it is shot more for the table than for sport. Sportsmen dislike to be thought of as "pot shooters". There may be a certain amount of exhilaration in shooting the birds as they wheel over the decoys and it is a pleasure to have delectable tidbits to distribute among one's friends. But as I have repeatedly stated, this bird is too valuable to the agricultural and grazing interests to be sacrificed for sport or for the table.

Arthur A. Allen, M.A., Ph.D., Professor of Ornithology at Cornell University says, "Today if a bird is to be considered game it must serve its best function as game; it shall not have a greater value as a destroyer of insects nor should it have a more esthetic value, and it should be prolific so that its numbers can withstand the strain of hunting." This would surely rule our plover out as a game bird.

It is generally conceded that the plovers are much scarcer than formerly. I am told that the flocks no longer resort to roost in the crater of Kilauea on Hawaii or to Manana Island off the Oahu Coast. Piles of empty gun cartridges on the seacoast and off-shore islands tell a sad tale. Recently I conversed with an old rancher who was a young man in the late eighties and a keen sportsman. He said that the plover used to swarm over all the country and that great numbers were shot over decoys. He agreed that the shooting over decoys is too easy and more like pot shooting than sport. He said that the ducks were in thousands and bags of over half a hundred were common. He also stated that the native goose could be seen in flocks of over fifty and there was no trouble in shooting a dozen of these birds. I can readily believe this as when we arrived in the early nineties we had no trouble during short stays in getting all the specimens we needed of both ducks and geese. On the island of Lanai where the plover has not been shot over decoys, these birds are seen at this time spread over all the open pineapple lands and pastures and even on the house lawns.

During recent years the sugar planters have been going to considerable expense to combat the army worm by gathering eggs, poisoning, and introducing insect feeding animals; some of which measures are not altogether safe. Whereas, had the plover been protected even as late as Perkins' investigation, these measures might not have been necessary. Where the birds are not shot at they frequent the house lots on Lanai. They certainly would feed over the open parts of the cane fields and get a great many of the caterpillars and the moths before they laid their eggs.

People from the towns who shoot these birds over decoys can have no idea of the feelings of the man on the land when he sees his helpers slaughtered in the name of sport. He may protect them on his own land but the birds periodically visit the sea coasts where the gunners take them at a disadvantage and shoot them down. When spread over the uplands the birds are more wary and keep out of gunshot but when reaching the shore lagoons the lure of decoys spells their destruction. Some of those in control of large areas of pasture land are becoming so disgusted with the failure of their efforts to save the plover that they contemplate stopping all game shooting on the lands under their control. These lands will then become sanctuaries



and the game birds will flock there as soon as the season opens. If a number of the landowners combine in this they will soon have a good weapon by which to gain protection for the plover.

What has been my experience with the plover? While collecting with the Rothschild Expedition 1890-92 we shot some specimens of this bird and found nothing but caterpillars and insects in their stomachs. This also holds for the few I shot on Kauai, Molokai and Lanai for my own collection. During thirty-seven years of ranch life on these Islands I have had much experience with the plover. Many times I have been almost in despair as the caterpillars were sweeping clear the grass on which I depended for fattening cattle for market. Then the situation has been changed and a load lifted from my shoulders when the Kolea, Akekeke and Mynah birds collected and seemed to say, "You've protected us, now we will help you out." They gorged themselves with caterpillars and presently stopped the invasion. Is it any wonder that I have a soft spot in my heart for these three useful helpers?

Now what do we know about the plover? We know that it arrives about August and September and leaves in April and May. We know that it spreads over the whole of the Pacific Islands, Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand. We know that in Siberia its clutch of eggs is but four. We don't know, however, whether the individuals that visit us here breed in Siberia or Alaska. We should at least learn more about these birds before we destroy them altogether.

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It will be a lasting disgrace to the people of Hawaii if the Hawaiian stilt is kept much longer on the list of game birds and no active means taken for its perpetuation. It is a unique bird, different from the mainland stilt and named after one of our pioneers and earliest bird students, Valdamar Knudsen. This is Himantopus knudseni, the aeo or kukuliaeo of the Hawaiians. It is a beautiful and interesting bird and would grace shore-line sanctuaries with the Plover, Turnstone and Coot and other interesting birds. These four would form large flocks and become comparatively tame on sanctuaries where they could be enjoyed by large numbers of people instead of furnishing fleeting pleasure to a limited few as at present. A remnant of the former large flocks of stilts that once inhabited Oahu, about 100 altogether, still frequent some of the shores and lagoons of this island. It is a prolific bird and if protected and cared for now would soon increase. If not it will vanish as it has done from Maui and Kauai and probably from Molokai.

In this campaign for the preservation of the shore waterfowl and migratory birds, I have appealed to many public bodies and private persons, and have had very encouraging responses by letter... My final appeal is now directed to everyone who has the good name of our beloved home at heart: those who for scientific reasons wish the native birds perpetuated; those, as the members of the Outdoor Circle for instance, who wish to add to the beauty of our landscapes; those who have a feeling of sentiment for the things of Old Hawaii; the hosts and hostesses who prize the plover as a table delicacy, to find a substitute; the sportsmen to be satisfied with the imported game birds which can be artificially kept up to "withstand the strain of hunting"; the Hui Manu to exert as much influence for the protection



of the native shore birds as it has done with good effect for the new birds being imported; and finally, to those who wish to give good assistance to our main industries. More especially I appeal to the descendants of the early missionaries, Hawaiians and others, who were here in those early days, and to whom the good name of the country is most dear.

Failure to have these birds protected can be blamed only on ourselves. I appeal to all to take an active interest in getting legislation permanently to protect our native shore water fowl, waders and migratory birds.

NOTE: This is the concluding part of a paper read by Mr. Munro at the Hawaiian Academy of Science, November 18th, 1938.

The shore birds are protected by the Federal Government under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the provisions of which are carried out by the Territorial Board of Agriculture and Forestry. However, Mr. Munro feels that a territorial law would give an added measure of protection. Such a law should also include our native non-migratory stilt and coot, now protected by regulations of the Board of Agriculture and Forestry, the sea birds, and should provide for adequate sanctuaries.

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March Birdwalk: Kaupa Pond, Kuliouou, was the setting for a nice lazy afternoon of bird watching, March 17th. Our neck craning was rewarded by the sight of a Black Brant, rarely seen here. It obligingly flew twice across the pond, nearer the water's edge than the pintails. Of the latter, there were many. We watched them bobbing on the water; finally, skillfully stirred by Mr. Cogswell, who was out on the pond in a row boat, they rose in a glorious flight, and were off to parts unknown. There were also a few tattlers, and one lone night heron.

NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE, MARCH 4th, 1945, p. 24-25, carries an article by Milburn McCarty, Jr., USMC, on Midway's birds, and pictures of the goonies in various entertaining poses.

The cover of the February issue of NATURAL HISTORY MAGAZINE is a beautiful picture in color of an iiwi, perched upon an ohia lehua tree. This is a photograph of one of the exhibits in Whitney Memorial Hall, of the American Museum of Natural History.

May Bird Walks: Saturday, May 12: Upper Makiki Valley. Meet at Punahou and Nehoa Streets at 2 P.M.

Sunday, May 20: Ti leaf slide, Woodlawn. Meet at the end of Paty Drive at 10:00 A.M. The trail is steep, and hob nailed shoes are helpful.

HONOLULU AUDUBON SOCIETY

President: Miss Grenville Hatch, 1548 Wilhelmina Rise, Honolulu 17, Hawaii: Vice President: Harold T. Cantlin: Secretary-Treasurer: Miss Blanche Anderson, 3669 Kawelolani Place, Honolulu 17, Hawaii

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