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My First Bird Walks in Hawaii By George C. Munro

If you can visualize the ridge from Punchbowl to Tantalus as covered with grass, no trees and only scattered shrubs among the grass; the eastern part of Nuuanu likewise, with only an occasional hau bush; the palis on either side, their pristine beauty in full view all the way, then you will see them as I saw them on that long ago December 53 years ago.

When Mr. Andrew Bloxam on May 13, 1825, went through the valley, its eastern end was evidently full of native forest, as was also the face of the cliff when Bloxam and the botanist, Macrae, started out for the east-end of the valley they left their pack donkey before they reached the Nuuanu stream. The trail was not even fit for a donkey. Bloxam in his diary said: "We climbed over several stone walls and crossed some gullies and ravines and then passing over a steep hill came into the beautiful valley of Anu Anu, which for a space of four or five miles from Honoruru is everywhere cultivated and covered with taro patches." Further on he says: "After we had gone four or five miles the huts and cultivated plants became scarcer and we entered into a thick wood." It would seem by this that the last two miles before reaching the Pali was in dense native forest. He thought the Pali was about eight miles from Honolulu, instead of five. On his return early in the morning of the 14th, coming up the trail he heard the Oahu thrushes singing "melodiously" and small birds chirping. In the valley he shot a male and female iiwi from a eugenia tree, (ohiaha or mountain apple) by the trail. He said they were "called by the natives hohiri and are rather scarce on this island as the natives wage continuous war against them for the sake of their feathers and take them in great numbers by bird lime which is made from the breadfruit tree." But there was no forest in the valley in 1890.

I had arrived from New Zealand on December 13, 1890. I was eager to make acquaintance with the Hawaiian forest in which I expected to spend a great deal of time in the following year. Though I had grown up on a farm I was well acquainted with the New Zealand "bush", as the forest is called there. I had traversed its "tracks" and helped to clear roads through its dense undergrowth, to fell and saw into lengths its magnificent kauri trees up to eight feet in diameter, with scarcely a taper in the trunk from the ground to the branches. I had read of the tropical "jungle" and wanted to know if that of Hawaii was more dense than the undergrowth in the New Zealand bush.

On December 17, I started to follow a trail up the ridge from Punchbowl. At one place I passed through a large area of recently planted seedling trees, in holes at intervals in the grass. I remarked that the grass made a fine protection for the trees from the wind which swept unimpeded down the hill-sides. From a distance the numerous holes made a curious pattern in the grass. Chinese laborers were at work clearing round the trees. This was the beginning of the fine forest covering those ridges today, and which strangers

think is native Hawaiian forest, whereas the trees are nearly all exotics.

A large bird was flying slowly over the grass in the distance. It occasionally alighted and I could only guess what it was. I thought it was a hawk, something like the New Zealand swamp hawk. I was not accustomed to seeing an owl flying round in the daytime. The little "morepork" owl that I knew was a night bird, calling "mopoke mopoke" in the trees near the window of my upstairs bedroom when I was a boy. On the sides of Tantalus hill there were groves of trees, koa or ohia with grass and shrubs between.

The top of Tantalus and the crater bottom were beautiful. The top was covered with different species of creeping grasses, each occupying a patch of ground to itself. In the bottom of the crater was a small lake "surrounded by beds of different shades and with a little fringe of reeds along its edges." The sides of the crater were pretty steep and covered with shrubs "but the bottom was like a carpet." A pair of ducks were swimming in the lake but they took wing and I could not tell for certain which species they were. I think, however, that they were the native duck, koloa. I did not go down into the crater but sat on the side enjoying the view. Another owl flew past and circled about the crater coming close enough for me to identify it as an owl. It alighted several times in the crater. The frequent alighting of the two birds I saw would indicate that they were probably young birds whose wings had not gained sufficient strength for sustained flight.

I did not visit the top of Tantalus again till 1935 when starting on the bird survey. All signs of the lake were gone. There was more scrubby vegetation and the rubbish left from picnicker's lunches disfigured the whole scene.

June 7, 1944

To be continued

Notes on the Mynahs By Thomas M. Blackman

Having been familiar with the terms "House Mynahs" and "Hill Mynahs" for fully fifty years, it came as a surprise to me to see that anyone should adopt the view that there is only one species of bird which can properly be called "The Mynah", with the statement that this or that bird is, or is not, "the true Mynah."

The Grackles, or "Talking Mynahs" are probably the most widely known of these birds, owing to their well deserved reputation as mimics, and their ability to imitate the human voice so much more exactly than any other birds, but that would hardly be considered due reason to entitle them to the exclusive right to a name which has been for long applied to others in the same family. By European ornithologists these birds are usually spoken of as "Grackles", and by bird keepers as "Talking Mynahs"; but let us see how ornithologists speak of them.

Frank Finn, late Deputy Superintendent of the Indian Museum, Calcutta; the author of several books on Indian birds, in his book "The World's Birds", dated 1908, p. 133 speaks of the "Starlings, or Mynahs." From this we may take it that in India, where those birds generally spoken of as Mynahs are best represented, the names "starling" and "mynah" are considered more or less synonymous.

The author first mentions the "House-Mynah of India. (*Acridotheres tristis*)" which is of course our bird; he then speaks of the "true talking Mynahs", but note, he does not, evidently, regard the word "true" as a part of the name of these birds, of which there are several species, as he does not use a capital letter in that word when writing the name. In my own experience I have known the designation "true", in connection with these birds, used chiefly by bird keepers, to emphasize the fact that they were speaking of those Mynahs which are able to speak so well, as apart from the others.

H. A. Macpherson and R. Lydekker, in their work on *The Passeres*, published by Carmelite House, London, 1910, speak of "the Indian Myna, or maina (*Acridotheres tristis*)", and, later, under the heading "Grackles", lists "the Indian Grackle (*Eulabates intermedia*)", the South Indian grackle (*E. religiosa*), the Malay grackle (*E. javanensis*), and *E. ptilogenys*, a species occurring in Ceylon, where the South Indian species also occurs. These of course are the talking mynahs.

The "true talking Mynah" which Walter Donaghho saw in Guadalcanal was probably none of these, but a related species; considering the distribution given for the four species listed; unless *E. javanensis* has a much wider distribution, reaching as far east as Guadalcanal; of which I have no evidence available, in my reference books.

Having consulted the ornithologists let us now go to that excellent books of reference--Webster's International Dictionary. I wished to trace, if I could, the origin of the word MYNAH. There we find that the word is of Hindu origin, and read "A common bird (*Acridotheres tristis*) allied to the Starlings, -- Also any of certain other species of the same and many allied genera. Some are taught to talk. -- See Hill Myna."

This seems to point, even more directly, to the little friend which we see on our lawns and house-tops as "The Mynah" rather than any other, but it has been shown that it is not proper to insist that the name be used only for one species of bird.

Though not my first meeting with them, my most memorable experience with the talking Mynahs occurred in 1908 in the London Zoological Gardens, where in earlier years I had been a frequent visitor.

While looking at some of the occupants of a large bird-room my attention was called to two ladies, similarly occupied at the other end of the room, by a voice, very clear and lady-like, and well modulated, "Oh - I am surprised at you -- I am surprised at you -- I am surprised at you." I was curious to know what occurrence had called forth this very pointed remark, as I imagined, from one of the two ladies, but went on studying the birds; however, when the two visitors had gone, and I went to the other end of the room, one of the birds explained it all. There were two different species of talking Mynah in separate cages, and as I walked up to look at them one of the birds greeted me with "Oh, I am surprised at you -- I am surprised at you."

It is remarkable that there should be so much misstatement about another of our imported birds. I refer to the House Sparrow, commonly spoken of as the English Sparrow, although its range extends right across the northern and central parts of Europe and Asia. We read that this bird was brought here from England, but that does not make it, as a species, especially English. Still, that is a small matter compared with the frequent misstatements by the writers of popular American books on birds. Though nearly all of them give this bird its correct name "House Sparrow", many of them follow it up by the state-

ment that it is not really a sparrow; and quite frequently add other misleading statements. Some saying that it is one of the Weaver Finches (Ploceidae), and others placing it among those birds without comment.

So usual is this condition that it looks almost as though there was a conspiracy to outlaw this bird and "take from it its good name."

Webster's Dictionary gives the word sparrow, with its older spellings -- sparowe, sparewe, and sparwe, as being of "Middle English" origin, and uses this term to cover the period between the years 1100 and 1400. As none of the birds occurring exclusively in America and going under the name "sparrow" would seem to have priority, it seems reasonable to accept the ruling of Webster's Dictionary on this matter. That authority, immediately after giving the origin of the name, attributes it to the House sparrow, or species of the genus *Passer*, or, by extension, to other finches. It, however states, that when applied to other species the name should bear a qualifying word, as Chipping sparrow - Java sparrow.

In the "Book of Birds", a quite recent publication, I read that the House sparrow is not really a sparrow, and that one way it differs from the "true sparrows" is that it makes a covered nest, also that it is "thought" to be one of the Weaver Finches.

From the above it is clear that when the American "sparrows" are spoken of collectively some qualifying word should be used, which would eliminate much of the confusion, and the wish to deprive the true Sparrows (*Passer domesticus* and other species of the same genus) of a name which they held long before the others were known.

The classification of birds, as of all animals, is of course, based on structural differences, and not on nest-making. Were it otherwise the Magpies, which make covered nests, would have to be removed from the crow family, the Crows and Jays making open nests; and numerous other changes.

One of the chief differences generally recognized between the true Finches (Fringillidae) and the Weaver Finches (Ploceidae), is that the former have nine primary feathers in the wing, while the latter have ten. Anyone having the opportunity to examine a sparrow may check on this for himself.

June 9, 1944

Mrs. Wade Warren Thayer writes to us of the good work being done for the birds at the Hawaiian Humane Society, as follows:

"I think that you will be interested in our bird sanctuary at the animal home at Moilili. Mrs. Carpenter, my executive secretary, has interested the children in all the Honolulu schools in birds as well as in animals. She is having a piece of land cleared for a bird sanctuary--children from Kuhio School, calling themselves junior commandos, have cleared the stones and made a place for a pool. Mrs. Carpenter has put in ink berries, elder berries and will add mulberries--and what do you think, a pair of Brazilian cardinals have already raised a family! We also have a bird bath and feeding stand."

Honolulu, June 18, 1944

Mr. Dean Amadon, ornithologist, has sent in the following notes on identities of some of the Tulagi species of which Walter Donaghho wrote in the July issue:

Cooie birds: These are starlings of the genus *Aplonis* of which there are several species in the Solomons. One of them as Donaghho mentions, builds hanging nests like a weaver bird. This seems unusual for a starling, but the Indian mynah, at least in India, sometimes builds globular nests among the branches of trees, thus showing a transition in nesting habits.

The small bird with bluish back and vermillion spot on the breast was doubtless a flower-pecker, *Dicaeum aeneum*, the only species of this family found on Tulagi.

The Orange-billed lory or rather parrot, (*Lorius roratus*) is unusual in that the female is red, and, to our notion, prettier than the green male. The sexes are so different they were considered separate species at one time. The species ranges through the East Indies into Australia.

The "shrikes" were probably not true shrikes, but rather Cuckoo-shrikes (*Campephagidae*), of which two or three species occur in the Solomons. Some of the Solomon Island white-eyes have yellow heads and are probably the small birds mentioned. The "true mynah" referred to is *Mino dumontii* of the Solomons and New Guinea, it is a close relative of the Indian mynah found in Hawaii, and no more of a "true" mynah than is the latter.

oOo

Dear Friends: I have taken advantage of the Art of Birdwalking because the great outdoors has always been a particular hobby with me. Back in the States I hunted and fished a lot but never paid much attention to no-game species. I just took the little fellows for granted--pheasants, quail, woodcock, now and then, fell victims.

Something has happened to my lust for game, however. It happened right after seeing "Bambi" on the screen--the deer shall never again be molested--and birdwalking has cured me of bird hunting. I guess some of us so-called sportsmen go through these stages and sooner or later repent of our sins--the shotgun put away for good.

The thing I like about walking about the island sanctuaries is that it offers a wonderful opportunity to relax and get away from the GI life of a soldier. I have not as yet tried to distinguish the different birds or familiarize the sounds and shrills. I have been contented to merely follow the leader and gaze out upon the beautiful panorama of the hills and valleys. And, too, I notice the deep interest manifested by the more experienced walkers; the accompanying excitement whenever a tantalizing sound emits from nowhere.

So I am just an innocent bystander--trying to catch on--and if I go often enough I believe I'll not only become an expert on birds but a complete and irrevocably converted wildlife enthusiast--no more shooting--but really glean some worthwhile philosophy and naturalism. Maybe a second Thoreau or Whitman. The beginning is auspicious enough and I'm sincerely impressed with the quietude of the woods and the serenity of animal life. The pace today is awfully fast--too fast for sane living. I crave the more tranquil way of life--and birdwalks are fast adding to that desire.

Perhaps I have no right to even suggest--but what can I lose? I should like to see more time devoted to these walks. I may be wrong--but I think my friends do not really devote the proper time. My last trip was spoiled by the obvious hurry on the part of some. Perhaps a dinner engagement or tea get-together. In my opinion the minute you have to start out with the idea of getting back at certain time--the purpose is defeated--how much more pleasant if there is no set time. And a light lunch will certainly come in handy for the tardy program. At any rate--eat you must--so why not in the woods?

Sincerely,

Louis Sisino

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J. d'Arcy Northwood, who has been editing THE ELEPAIO for several years, is on a business trip to the mainland. While there, he plans to visit Audubon National Headquarters in New York, as well as other Audubon groups wherever possible. He has promised us reports on the activities of mainland bird clubs and we hope to have something for the next issue of THE ELEPAIO.

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Next bird walk: Meet at Puunui Park at the end of the Liliha-Puunui trolley line with the transfer for the Alewa Heights bus, August 12th, 2:00 p.m. for a walk along the Alewa trail.

HONOLULU AUDUBON SOCIETY

President: J. d'Arcy Northwood, 3449 Paty Drive, Honolulu 15, Hawaii.

Vice President: Miss Hazel Peppin, 2524 East Manoa Road, Honolulu 5.

Sec. Treas.: Miss Grenville Hatch, 1548 Wilhelmina Rise, Honolulu 17.

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