

# THE ELEPAIO

## Journal of the HONOLULU AUDUBON SOCIETY

For the Better Protection of Wildlife in Hawaii

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### A BIRD WALK IN NEW CALEDONIA

By Walter Donaghho

Finding a morning to myself, I decided on a hike up into the valleys to the rear of the camp to see what I could find of island bird life. I went down to the stream running through camp, and followed it. After leaving the camp, the banks of the stream become more precipitous, and soon the stream was flowing through a little ravine about fifteen feet deep. A trail followed along the rim. The sides of the ravine were clothed with a fine variety of plants. I noted some conifers. Another plant had white blossoms resembling those of the silver oak. It was, I believe, in the same genus, as I later saw a tree with pods, and they were exact counterparts of the silver oak pods. The leaves were different, however, and were green with a rich brown underneath. There were two or three kinds of bottlebrushes; one with white blossoms, and another with beautiful red blossoms.

Green honeysuckers were everywhere, and filled the air with their sweet cheery songs. I descended the bank of the stream and followed another trail. Once, from a patch of woods across the stream, I heard a strange bird whistling two ascending notes. I imitated, and it answered. Presently a black and white fly catcher flew out into the open. It was a myiagra, or crested flycatcher. It was larger than the Guadalcanal species, and was a dark smoky blueblack. I tried a series of "sweets" and it answered, only repeating the notes twice, instead of in succession, as in the case of the Guadalcanal species.

A "silver oak", as I will call it, was covered with beautiful blossoms, and a flock of white eyes was feeding on them in company with several honeysuckers. As I approached the tree, a scarlet honeysucker flew out and perched in a sapling bottlebrush in plain sight. It had a beautiful red head, a white breast, and black wings. It approached and sipped from one of the red blossoms, then sang a high pitched passage resembling "It's right, dear", and flew off.

I came to the stucco home of a French family that owned or managed an open nickel mine on a point towering above the valley, and several thatched huts of his Tonkinese workers and gardeners. I climbed the bank and walked through the gardens and small plantations of the farm. As I climbed the bank, I flushed a reddish brown, green winged pigeon from a clump of ironwoods growing by the stream. A path up the valley led through a scrub forest, in which I noticed guava bushes. The white blossoms of the silver oaks were in beautiful contrast with the green foliage. The bush fairly rang with the sweet loud notes of the honeysuckers which



were everywhere, and it made quite a pleasant din of bird melody. Once I scared up a flock of brown finches that were feeding in clumps of grass along the trail. They landed in trees nearby, and I got a chance to look them over. They had bright red beaks and a patch of red on their breasts. A little further on, I saw a bright green, red headed bird fly up with another flock of brown finches, and recognized it as the tri-colored finch.

As the trail progressed, the valley became narrower. The sides were well wooded, covered with forest about fifteen feet high in spots. The stream forked further on, and I took the fork to the right, climbing over the bright orange rocks of the stream bed. I heard a high thin bird note in the forest along the right bank, and discovered a greenish brown bird with a yellow belly and a grey breast. It was about twice as fat as the amakihi, and a little larger. I also saw a smaller bird of ricebird size that was dull green above and grey below (later identified as the grey warbler). A second bird of the former species flew into a dense thicket of trees. I went down under them and started looking for the bird, which had disappeared. Suddenly I saw a nest placed upon a sloping branch. The bird was sitting on it. Its mate flew down, opened its bill, and the sitting bird reached into the other's throat and took out something to eat. It flew off the nest as I neared, and I examined it. The nest was the size of a tea-cup, and was placed on a sapling about half an inch thick. It was woven about several twigs of another sapling that leaned across the main stem. It was thin walled, like a white eye's nest, and was constructed of dead twigs. Bits of bark were woven into the outside of the nest for camouflage. These averaged a quarter inch by three quarters. Within were two white, brown speckled eggs. A chocolate ring encircled the large end. The nest was eight feet above the ground.

Going on, I scrambled up the slope of the valley through the brush. The height of the trees on the hillside averaged eight feet, with occasional evergreens twelve feet. The ground was strewn with boulders, and a grass with shiny reed-like stems grew in bunches among them. The trees were of great variety, and I noted many that resembled Hawaiian species. Several looked as if they may have been of the ohia family, and I saw some ends of naked stems, resembling Hawaiian plants that I have seen in the rain forest. And I came upon a naupaka! It had the same half flowers, white in color. The leaves were smaller and more slender, and were a dark, dull green. There were several ti plants with waxy green leaves, also smaller and more slender.

The forest diminished in size as I neared the summit, and the vegetation along the top of the ridges was mere scrub, less than three feet in height. There were large barren areas of red dirt. Up the main ridge that encircled a large bowl-shaped valley, the vista was magnificent. Far below was the French farm, and below that, the camp, sprawled out over the barren floor of the outer and main valley. Beyond the camp were the cocoanut groves, gardens, and pastures of the little village, nestled along the shores of a cove of the brightest blue. Across the ravines and over the red streaked mountains beyond, I could see Mt. Des Kirghis, behind



the Noumea peninsula. To the east, I looked for miles across a wide valley.

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I proceeded along the ridge, around the rim of the valley to the next ridge, which I descended. I passed through a dry scrub forest of trees about six feet high and smashed through a thicket of these and a bush that resembled pukeawe. The ground was strewn with large boulders, and I had to watch my step. Now and then I smelt an odor that suggested the presence of a "backhouse" in the near vicinity. Knowing that no such thing existed, I started looking for the source of the smell. Suspecting a plant near me with tiny white blossoms, I picked a cluster and sniffed. Phew! Pilau!

I reached the main stream and followed it out of the valley. Honeysuckers serenaded me as I went. Once, in a patch of cool woods along the banks, a fantail flycatcher came up to watch me. Coming into camp again, I walked through scattered groves of niauoli. On the top of one was a strange bird, vigorously bobbing and wagging its tail. It stayed on the perch as I walked up to the tree to look it over. It was the size of a mynah, and was blue slate in color, with a white belly and a sooty head and tail. The latter kept bobbing and wagging constantly. It had a light bluish-white bill. Suddenly it darted out, snapped up some insect and returned to its perch, where it sat once more, and wagged its ever moving tail.

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"Birds of the Central Pacific" by Thomas M. Blackman, is just off the press. This welcome addition to the literature concerning the birds inhabiting the waters and shorelines surrounding and to the south of Hawaii will be of value to anyone interested in these birds and especially to men of the United States Armed Services to whom it is dedicated and who may traverse these seas. It is a book of 70 pages dealing with 48 sea birds and 15 waders, with 16 plates showing 30 species of birds. It takes in of course all the Hawaiian sea birds but where we have five petrels and six terns this book has 16 petrels and 14 terns.

Mr. Blackman's personal observations on habits of the sea birds of Midway are particularly valuable from a scientific viewpoint. He is an expert photographer of birds and some of the plates are exceptionally beautiful and interesting. The frontispiece with the red-footed booby straining every nerve to reach the beach before being compelled to disgorge its prey for the pursuing frigate bird, is very real. The frigate generally gives up the chase when the booby reaches over the land, hence its final frantic effort plainly depicted in the picture. Nos. 15 and 16 of the white tern and its unique nesting place are especially beautiful. The one just alighted is about to spread its breast feathers over the egg. The egg is too large and its legs too short to allow it to sit on the egg, so it stands beside it deftly covering it with its feathers.

August 30, 1944

George C. Munro



"Birds of Hawaii National Park", by Paul H. Baldwin, reviewed by Dean Amadon in the October 1944 Elepaio, has been reprinted and is available at 10¢ a copy through the Natural History Association of Hawaii National Park, according to information received from Miss Janet Bell, Librarian in charge of Hawaiiana at the University of Hawaii Library. There are about 900 copies available, the profits from the sale of which will be used to further the publication of pamphlets on the natural history of the park region or on similar projects that will result in the dissemination of knowledge concerning the area.

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"An Extinct Goose from the Island of Hawaii" by Alexander Wetmore. From "The Condor", vol. 45, pp. 146-148, 1943.

During drilling operations on Hawaii the limb bones of a large bird were found in deposits believed to be thousands of years old. Dr. Wetmore finds the bones to be those of an undescribed genus and species of fossil goose, which he names Geochen rhuax. Surprisingly, this bird was not related to the Nene (Nesochen) but rather to the Australian upland goose, Cereopsis. Another fossil relative of Cereopsis is known from New Zealand, suggesting that this subgroup of geese was once widely distributed on the Pacific islands.

Dean Amadon

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#### COMMENTS ON "BIRDS OF HAWAII" (continued) By George C. Munro

There is also a letter from Walter Donaghho, one of those young men who I hope will carry on the study of the Hawaiian birds for many years to come and help to unravel much that is now mysterious concerning them. I find I overlooked some of his notes when working on the "Birds of Hawaii". He had informed me that in 1936 he saw a pair of oo-aa on the Waialeale trail, Kauai. He imitated their call and brought them up close to him. He said: "Their identification was certain, they were only four or five feet from me. Their song is a series of flutelike notes. In 1911 Eric Knudsen reports seeing oo near Kokee." It was the Oahu oo that he thought he heard but did not see, that I referred to in "Birds of Hawaii" erroneously as the Kauai bird. He says: "I heard the bird twice. The first time I heard a succession of loud notes that somewhat resembled those of the ocarina. They were very loud and I judged the bird to have been 300 yards away. I heard it again about half a mile further up the trail. This time it was a loud call repeated twice. These notes though much louder, also had the quality of some of the notes of the oo-aa....I have no less than three reports of a black bird with yellow feathers seen in the forests of Oahu. A fourth one stated that a bird was heard emitting notes like the barking of a dog heard in the distance." It certainly would be a wonderful thing if the oo still existed on Oahu. Still it is possible, and as long as enthusiasm exists for the pursuit of facts further light may be thrown on the subject of



birds thought possibly extinct. Donaghho feels sure that the akialoa still exists on Oahu. He says: "There was no mistaking the two birds I saw on Kauai in 1936 and 1941...I also heard another one that I didn't see. Its call once heard is easily recognized being that loud "Keewit". I hope Donaghho is right but I always remember that I was nearly deceived myself in 1936 with a young iiwi on Kauai that I took for a young akialoa, and I, some 50 years before of course, was very well acquainted with the akialoa of Kauai. He goes on: " I believe I heard one on Maunakea (Hawaii) in 1940. The call was very loud, identical with the Kauai species.....The Akepa seen on the Kipapa trail (Oahu), I believe, in 1935. I saw it plainly and noted its small size, about the size of a rice bird. It was brown above, and was washed with orange about the head and front. It was a female bird... able to watch the bird through my binoculars. It sat in full view while it preened its feathers a bit."

"In 1937, while working in the Hawaii National Park, I saw a female koa finch. This bird was plainly seen through my binoculars after I had called it into the trees over my head, and I noticed its bill which was the bill of the koa finch resembling somewhat, the bill of a grossbeak. It was certainly not an ou. I had seen ou in Kona in 1933...the color was dull green, whitish below. It emitted several long whistles." From Donaghho's report to Superintendent Wingate at the end of his and Craddock's work in the Hawaii National Park in 1937 speaking of Rhodacanthis the so-called koa finch: "I saw only one bird at the edge of the koa forest south of the Bird Park on July 2, and have not heard it since." He sent me a copy of his June 30 report which said "Kipuka, Puaulu, I saw a female koa finch (Rhodacanthis). I heard it whistle. I imitated it and it flew into plain sight on a branch about 20 feet away." This refers to the same bird and the same occasion, the discrepancy in dates is a mistake easily made. Donaghho has a remarkable advantage in being able to imitate the birds almost exactly and bring them close to him. In this way he is apt to see many more birds than others. Often some of us could hardly credit that he saw so many birds and suspected that he counted going out and back. With some birds it is extremely difficult to get an accurate count even if one counts only when going one way. If one counts both ways coming and going he is almost sure to count some birds twice. But some birds as apapane and iiwi which fly backwards and forwards quickly, counting when going only one way is often not accurate. One can get a fairly accurate count of most Hawaiian forest birds, those which keep in the trees and do not fly overhead if he counts when going in one direction and never includes any on his return.

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In regard to the Kentucky cardinal flying against the window pane, mentioned in the July issue: On May 6 a cat caught a cardinal, and although the cat was made to release it and it flew away apparently unhurt it has never come back to the window. It either died from its injuries or perhaps left the locality. A cardinal continues to sing and I have seen one frequently but whether the one that used to bump on the window I have no way of telling. Whether it saw its own reflection in the glass as



suggested by J.d'A.N. cannot be proved even if one could reach the pane we cannot be sure that birds see the same things that we do. I am quite sure they sense things which are not perceptible to us. Why it would return repeatedly during the day and every day for months to fight an opponent with which it could not come in contact is inexplicable to me. It might have thought it was keeping its opponent at bay. It seemed to strike with the upper part of its beak, if it struck with the end of its bill it would surely have broken or crushed it but its bill appeared to be undamaged.

In trapping rats with spring traps it is unsafe to leave the trap set in the daytime where cardinals can get to it. I prefer to keep the trap set continuously with cocoanut bait but if set on the ground it must be protected from cardinals. The Kentucky cardinal forages on the ground a good deal. Traps set all the time catch the rats as they come and the others do not get wise to the trap. However, places can be found where cardinals are not likely to go.

Oct. 5, 1944

George C. Munro

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# OCTOBER BIRD WALK

B. M. Kuhns

Audubon bird-lovers had their rendezvous at the Library of Hawaii. Transportation was very kindly provided by different members, and after driving out along Dillingham Boulevard, we again met at our first destination, the Kalihi Flats.

I laughed to myself as we all walked along the railroad ties, intent on seeing birds as well as enjoying other offerings of nature, while traffic hurried in all channels to and from the city without a pause. We were happy in our pursuits, and the day itself was bright and sunny. The mountains behind us were clear-cut, and presented varying shades of green, blue, and purple.

Ah! There they were! Stilts! Eleven of them standing in the water, so straight and important!

Then we came to an area where there was no vegetation. A lone plover perched on a rock was our next discovery. Then a tattler appeared. After a little while, turnstones were mentioned. Sure enough, not one, but sixteen or more, just resting in a little shallow near the water's edge.

Aeroplanes flying overhead, blue dragonflies flashing by, and fishes leaping about in the water, were other sights which caught our attention now and then. About an hour later we left the salty region to return to the automobiles which were parked in a clearing off the main road. It was rather difficult to cross the highway, but when at last we were safe across, we drove to the Moanalua Fish Ponds.

What a pleasing sight! There were over one hundred stilts,



feeding, preening, standing; while a few restless ones were walking around in the mud. Then four creatures were seen flying over the pond. They were pin-tailed ducks. A group of black birds over to the right in the water were coots.

Then I saw a big, rather heavy flying feathered object traveling toward some mango trees. It was a heron. A stroll on a path along the pond's edge among green and yellow pickleweed and pulchea bushes brought us very close to the stilts. At this time I turned to count the bird walkers and learned that there were twenty-six of us.

As the coolness and quiet of late afternoon settled over this peaceful area, we began to return to the automobiles. The bird walk was over, but I had enjoyed a very interesting and gainful experience, my first, among birds.

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One of our number reports that on checking with Peterson's GUIDE, he decided the ducks, taken by many of us to be pintails, were immature baldpates.

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Next birdwalk: Meet at the second (mauka) intersection of Alani and Woodlawn at 2:00 p.m. on November 11.

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