

THE ELEPAIO

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Notes on Bird Study By George C. Munro

From its earliest settlement New Zealand has had enthusiastic bird students. One of these, Mrs. Valdemar Knudsen, brought with her when she was a young girl from New Zealand knowledge of how to prepare and preserve bird skins. She saved specimens of the many forest birds of Kauai that were blown to the lowlands in wind storms and died there. The bird collection made by the Knudsens created great interest in scientific circles in Washington, D. C. when it was sent to the Smithsonian Institution in the late eighteen eighties. The study of bird life in New Zealand has been carried on privately by individuals, by associations and museums, but still the study is far from completed. Within the last few years the Ornithological Society of New Zealand has been instituted. A publication of this Society has lately reached me and with it is an article containing "Suggestions to Observers" which appeals to me as suitable for circulation among members of the Honolulu Audubon Society which corresponds it part to the New Zealand Society. So I have copied such parts as I think apply to us here in Hawaii and submit them with this.

From the Ornithological Society of New Zealand "Suggestions to Observers"

"No bird is too common to be worthy of careful study. In this country there are not only the native birds, but there is also the especially interesting problem of how the introduced birds are fitting into their new surroundings, and whether they are changing their habits."

"The first task of the bird watcher is to acquire the habit of noticing birds, and then the power of identifying them and making accurate notes on what is seen. The notes must be accurate, so written at the time if possible--not from memory later--and precise, giving date, time, place, weather, etc. Avoid terms such as 'scarce', 'more common', 'well grown chick' etc. as far as possible. Try to give actual numbers and measurements. Any uncertainty on the part of the observer as to identification or anything else must be recorded in the notes. In order to identify the birds and study them intelligently books are required." The article then goes on to name various books on New Zealand birds. "It is highly desirable that the bird watcher should possess a pair of field glasses, but plenty of work can be done without them."

The following are only a few suggestions as to lines of work which may be undertaken. It is not necessary to make elaborate expeditions to study birds, many valuable contributions to science may be made at home without unduly upsetting one's ordinary life.

The officers of the Society will be pleased to give assistance and advice, one of the main objects of the Society being to encourage field work on birds and to bring workers into touch with one another and with work on their particular line."

1. "Precise and accurate data on all nests are wanted, e.g. date, clutch size, incubation and fledgling periods, mortality, number of broods, situation, which sex builds and incubates, etc., etc. Size, position, annual changes, etc. with regard to nesting colonies."
2. "Song:-This is difficult to record though systems have been devised. Records of dates of the beginning and ending of the period are required for all species, and if possible notes on the intensity of song."
3. "Some birds maintain a nesting territory from which they drive away intruders. This subject lends itself to intensive study in a limited area. The extensive literature should be consulted"
4. "Counts of the actual numbers of birds are interesting and valuable, especially if repeated at intervals. They may take the form of a census of the bird population (and nests) of an area, the numbers on a lake or some feeding ground, such as a mud flat, etc. Also the relation of the numbers observed to season, weather, migration, etc."
5. "All roosting habits are worthy of study. Some birds, e.g., starlings assemble to roost in flocks and their numbers and movements are interesting."
6. "Some stretches of beach often have dead seabirds washed up on them. Periodical visits should be made to identify and count them. The museum will want any unusual specimens and probably and fresh ones. Most birds are protected and so naturally dead ones should not be wasted as in this way valuable specimens may be acquired for museums without any being killed. (It is illegal to be in possession of protected birds without legal sanction). It would be valuable to learn the standard method of measuring birds and to measure all which may be encountered. We cannot have too many reliable measurements of any bird."
7. "Number 7 is taken up with information on banding or "ringing" as it is called in New Zealand and Australia. Bird banding is conducted here under the Fish and Wildlife Service on a very advanced system. The writer would be pleased to give any information wished on this to anyone desiring to take up the study. The Fish and Wildlife Service have a Manual for Bird-banders of which I usually have some spare copies for anyone taking up the work."
8. "One species may be selected, preferably a common one so that it is constantly available, and an intensive study of it made from every possible point of view."

9. "A local list may be prepared and studied from the point of view of the habitats in which each species is found."
10. "Dates of arrival and departure of migratory birds should be noted. Any information about seasonal movements is interesting."
11. "Residents of long standing in a district may provide information of historical interest regarding the dates of recent extinction of some birds and the arrival and spread of others. If the same information is supplied by a number of persons independently, its chances of being accurate is greater. Such information has seldom been recorded."

A large number of species have been recently introduced to Hawaii. Those which become established will be sure to change somewhat in this different climate. The house sparrow for instance has changed from a hoisy to a quiet bird. The descendants of cage canaries, liberated on Midway Island, changed from yellow to white and brown birds, and intermediate changes of color. I think it would be good scientific study to take specimens of these introduced birds periodically if they become common. It this is done under proper regulations no harm could possibly result and much valuable information be put on record.

No. 3 Song: I have seen it stated that birds sing to proclaim their right to a certain preempted nesting area. Some species evidently do this. I have noticed white eyes singing in the early mornings at intervals along the roadside. But I am sure they also sing for other reasons. The lyre bird sings on its mound while its mate sits on a branch close by apparently enjoying the song. I have seen a female linnet singing while its mate was feeding it, the female having left its eggs to take the food from its mate. Also a Chloridops sang vigorously while searching for its lost mate. Perkins records birds singing when frightened.

No. 6: We do not have numbers of dead birds washed up on the beaches here as happens after storms in New Zealand. But often straggling sea birds arrive and are found dead on the beaches. The Bishop Museum has several specimens of them that I saved. Interesting data is accumulated in this way. In regard to measurements I cannot say at present writing which system is generally followed. The Rothschild expedition (over 50 years ago) measured the total length of a few of each species. The measurements were taken from the tip of the bill to the end of the tail, following all curvatures. But Rothschild in his book did not always follow these measurements. From "The Game Birds of California" published by the University of California in 1918 I take the following. "Total Length--With the bird laid flat on its back, the head straight out, and the neck not unduly stretched, measure from the tip of the bill to the end of the longest tail feather."

"Folded Wing--With the wing folded naturally against the side of the bird, measure in a straight line from the bend of the wing ('wrist joint') to the tip of the longest primary flight feather."

"Bill Along Culmen--Measure in a straight line from the last feathers on the middle of the forehead to the tip of the bill. This is really the 'chord of the culmen,' and does not take into account any irregularity or curve in the profile of the bill."

Tarsus--Measure from the notch of the 'hock' or 'heel' at the upper end of the tarsus to and over the rounded knob on the front of the lower end of the tarsus at the base of the middle toe."

"Middle Toe(without claw)--With the foot pressed against some flat surface so that the toes are spread out, measure from the angle just below the lower end of the tarsus to the base of the claw."

"Eggs--Measured with calipers; specimens with holes in their ends are likely to fall short of the measurements given for the longest dimension."

Nov. 1, 1944

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THE BIRD COLLECTION OF THE BISHOP MUSEUM, HONOLULU.

By Dean Amadon

The collection of native Hawaiian birds of the Bishop Museum is rivaled in size and completeness only by those of the American Museum of Natural History, New York (Rothschild acquisition) and of the British Museum and certain other English institutions. Among the Hawaiian rarities in the Bishop Museum the following are outstanding: two of the seven known specimens (most of which are still scattered in private collections) of the Hawaiian Shearwater (Puffinus newelli); two of the five known specimens of the Hawaiian Rail (Pennula millsi); one of the four existing specimens of the honey-eater (Chaetoptila); the best of the three known examples of Gruidops; and four specimens of each of the two species of Mamo (Drepanis pacifica and funerea). Most other Hawaiian rarities, with the exception of a few subspecies, are better represented.

The specimens just mentioned, other than the Shearwater and Drepanis funerea, were originally in the collection of J. D. Mills of Hilo, Hawaii, which was acquired by C. R. Bishop shortly after he founded the Bishop Memorial Museum. Bishop generously disposed of duplicate specimens of each of these rarities to Scott B. Wilson who was collecting birds in Hawaii at the time. Wilson took some of these to his sponsor,

Professor Newton, at Cambridge University, England, while others went to the Rothschild collection. Later the Bishop Museum acquired one-third of the extensive series of Hawaiian birds amassed by Dr. R. C. L. Perkins and the large collections gathered by the late Professor W. A. Bryan on the main islands and on Laysan. The fine collection made by Henshaw during his period of residence on Hawaii was also secured. The last important Hawaiian collection to be received by the Bishop Museum was that of the veteran Pacific naturalist, George C. Munro. The museum also has collections of birds nests, eggs, skeletons and specimens preserved in the flesh.

The non-Hawaiian birds of the Bishop Museum are mostly from other islands of the Pacific such as the Marquesas, Marianas, New Hebrides and other groups difficult of access for the naturalist. Many species of birds frequently lacking in larger museums elsewhere are present. Among other rarities may be mentioned a fine specimen of the Wake Island Rail and one of Bonin Island passerine, Apalopteron; the latter collected so recently as 1931. A number of little known Polynesian species collected by the Whitney South Sea Expedition were obtained in exchanges with the American Museum of Natural History. These include the Tuamotu sandpiper and ground dove and the Henderson Island rail. Specimens of the latter, preserved in the flesh, were also brought back by a Bishop Museum Expedition. A considerable number of birds from Borneo and New Guinea are in the Bishop Museum as well as a series of mounted New Zealand birds which has some rarities such as the Huia (Heteralocha) and all four species of Kiwis.

The writer noticed the following type specimens of birds in the Bishop Museum, others may have been overlooked: Hawaiian Shearwater (Puffinus newelli Henshaw); Guam Least Bittern (Ardetta bryani Searle, now Ixobrychus sinensis bryani); Marcus Island Lesser Noddy (Micranous marculi W. A. Bryan, now Anous minutus marculi, if valid); cotype of Hawaiian Rail (Pennula millsi Dole); cotype of Fringilla anna Dole (now Ciridops anna); Molokai Thrush (Phaeornis rutha W. A. Bryan, now P. obscurus rutha); and the unique Lanai specimen Dysmorodrepanis munroi Perkins, which, as Greenway pointed out, is perhaps only an aberrant Ou (Psittacirostra psittacea).

Anyone in the Hawaiian Islands seriously interested in birds will find the collection of the Bishop Museum of great interest. In addition to the study skins, mounted specimens of most of the native species are on exhibition. Many of the introduced species, however, are lacking or poorly represented. This is a serious deficiency, since the only land birds to be seen in the populated areas of the islands, at least on Oahu, are exotics. It would be an excellent project for a local bird student to make collections including both study skins and mounted specimens of the commoner introduced species for the museum. The mounts would be useful for learning to identify birds in the field while the study specimens would sooner or later be valuable in studying the important question of possible

evolutionary changes taking place in the introduced birds. Years ago the late Dr. J. Grinnell of the University of California described the California House Finches introduced into the Hawaiian islands as a new subspecies on the basis of color changes he believed them to possess. This aroused considerable controversy. It would be interesting to make a collection of this species and study the question in the light of present knowledge.

"Contribution to the Ornithology of the Hawaiian Islands" by E. H. Bryan, Jr. and J. C. Greenway, Jr. from "Bulletin of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard College" (Cambridge, Mass.), vol. 94, pp. 77-142, 1944.

This contribution is prefaced with a popular essay by the senior author on the general features of Hawaiian bird-life and the history of its discovery. It contains several errors but will be useful to those unfamiliar with the subject. A check-list of Hawaiian birds similar to that recently published in the "Elepaio" by the senior author, but omitting introduced species, comprises the principal part of the paper. The present status of the rarer species of native birds is not so fully treated as in Munro's "Birds of Hawaii," which appeared earlier in the same year. No attempt is made to eliminate the many superfluous genera of Hawaiian Hone-creepers (Drepaniidae). The 21 species recognized in this family are divided among 16 genera, of which 11 contain but 1 species each and the remainder 2 each! The junior author concludes the paper with a discussion of the inter-relationships of the genera of Drepaniidae. This somewhat abstruse subject cannot be discussed here, but in the reviewer's opinion, Greenway by basing his conclusions almost entirely upon a single character, the structure of the tongue, has reached an arrangement far less natural than that of Perkins (reproduced by Munro, page 90), which was based on very comprehensive studies of both living birds and specimens.

D. Amadon.

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NOVEMBER BIRD WALK B. M. Kuhns

Ten bird-lovers started from the second (mauka) intersection of Alani and Woodlawn on the November bird walk, which was really a hike that ended over a trail in the west uplands overlooking upper Manoa Valley.

The day was pleasant, and the path led through beautiful areas of green. There were ferns, tall grass, ti plants, mountain orchids, club moss, guava and koa trees. The whistle of the elepaio attracted us. Then we stood to see the feathered creature with head, neck, and shoulders of buff, and a brown back, among the branches of a tree.

After some slips and skids along the way, we halted to watch a hill robin. Farther along we saw a male Kentucky cardinal.

Then we sat to rest among mountain ginger, moss-covered rocks and kukui trees. Another friendly elepaio came near enough for our close observation of him. Someone recognized the call of the

apapane in the distance.

The walk was resumed. Then we climbed a hill that had a thick growth of staghorn fern. It was somewhat unpleasant traveling for a few minutes, but the view of the valley far below, with climbing screw pine in blossom, and the freshness of koa flowers and ferns all around, were rewards enough for us.

We took another rest before our descent to the lower levels which brought us to a Christmas berry tree with dense clusters of bright red berries growing near a little rippling stream. Some of the group saw a Japanese tit, while others saw a Chinese thrush.

This excursion, although not too eventful in bird life, proved to be very beautiful in scenery and furnished much exercise and enjoyment for all.

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TWO OWLS

The prairie road was hot and fragrant resinous scent came from the pines scattered thinly over the flat contry. Away to the north a dark line of trees marked the course of a creek, oaks massing in darker clumps.

I left that hot sandy road and struck off across the prairie to the nearest clump. As some fish can see both above and below water at the same time so one needs eyes that can watch the trees above and the ground below, for in the trees are the birds and on the ground are snakes. Snakes are not looking for trouble, but when there are rattlers about it is best to see them first. There are not many, but one can be enough. Two cowboys told me that they had seen only two in a year of riding the prairie every day. They killed them, which was a pity, for snakes, even poisonous ones, have their place and unless cornered or surprised will try to get away. I would like to see one alive, but not too close. I have seen several dead on the roads, killed by automobiles and attended by vultures, Florida's most efficient sanitary department.

White-eyed towhees flipped out of the clumps of saw palmettos, perched on top for a moment and dived back again. These saw palmettos are odd plants, they are really prostrate palms, their trunks and branches sprawl on the ground and the fronds form a dense cover three or four feet high over great areas of the prairie.

The pines became closer and I entered the shade of the oaks. A large bird swooped silently from a branch and lighted in a tree further off. I saw it was a big owl and I went quickly after it. There it was, standing on a bough, watching me. I stood still and after a while it relaxed and gazed off into the distance. When I moved it turned its great round head to me again. Owls differ

from most birds in that they have faces, they look full at an object, like a man. Other birds have their eyes set at the sides of their heads and can see almost all around at once.

Every time I moved round came that great head and those big dark eyes calmly gazed at me. I moved gently nearer and I noticed that he could turn his head until it was facing backward. Soon I was under the tree and still the owl sat there. He preened himself, running the feathers through his beak. Then he shook and the feathers swirled about him, exposing his long shanks. I took all the notes I could and moved further away to get him in the focus of my glasses. Let's see him fly, I thought, and clapped my hands. The owl only gazed reprovingly. I felt a little ashamed of disturbing him, so I went quietly away.

The book tells me that it was a barred owl, but I learned something about owls that is not in the books.

Strangely enough, as I walked back to the car through the pines another big owl flew out of a tree and lighted near by. I followed and again he flew off, but soon he allowed me to approach closely and I had a fine view of a great horned owl. He had a different character to the barred owl, fierce and strong, his ear tufts bent in the breeze as he gazed with his fierce yellow eyes.

We are too apt to read human attributes into birds. Because the barred owl had a round face and great dark eyes I called him calm and solemn; the great horned, because of his tufts and yellow eyes, seemed almost satanic in his fierceness. Both are wild creatures and far removed from our way of thinking; the shape of the face and the color of the eyes are no indication of what passes in their minds.

J. d'Arcy Northwood

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HILL ROBINS COMING DOWN FROM HEIGHTS

On November 3rd, hill robins suddenly appeared on the campus of Roosevelt High School; a flock of at least twenty being observed. This was the first time that they had been seen in this vicinity, although a few had been heard around the school on the preceding day. No flock has been observed since but a few birds appear to have taken up permanent residence. During the course of the same week, a few hill robins descended Wilhelmina Rise by slow degrees, arriving after two or three days at the first intersection.

If other people have observed similar movement at the same time in other areas, the Elepaio would be glad to hear about it and to entertain any theories from observers as to the cause of this descent.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PINTAIL VS IMMATURE BALDPATE CONTROVERSY.
(See The Elepaio for Nov. 1944)

October 31, 1944

Dear Miss Hatch,

A few days ago I received your letter and then yesterday the new "Elepaio" came. It wasn't until then that I realized there was a misunderstanding about the ducks seen on the field trip last month. The first four ducks we saw came flying in and settled in the middle of the pond; these were Pintails (3 in dull or female plumage and 1 male) as reported by Kuhns in the November "Elepaio." These were also probably what you had reference to in your letter. So far as I know there was never any question of the fact that they were Pintails as the male was unmistakable.

At the far corner of the pond, however, the three ducks, which we first saw swimming and I later stalked and flushed, were the immature Baldpates. They had shorter necks and tails and were of a much darker general coloration than the female Pintails; the mottled gray head contrasted sharply with the dark brown upperparts and breast, and the white belly was cut off sharply from the brown. These features, plus the faint line of white diagonally across the wing above the dark speculum were the identifying features as per Peterson's description. So far as I can see we were talking about different birds.

On my last visit ashore, Miss Kojima and I had a rare treat in seeing some 40 - 50 Frigate birds, male, female, and immature. Some came quite low over us and it was a great sight to see them making steady headway against the rather stiff wind without a flap of the wings. We also had good close views of Golden Plover and Turnstones in a nearby spot that would be good for a club trip I think.

Yours sincerely,

H.L.C.

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DECEMBER BIRD WALK: On December 9, Saturday, at 2 o'clock, meet at end of Kuliouou bus line for bird walk in that district.