

Distribution and Status of Mynas in American Samoa

by Pepper W. Trail¹

The Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) and the Jungle Myna (*A. fuscus*), both native to India, are widely established as breeding birds on islands of the Pacific (Pratt et al. 1987, Watling 1982). The purpose of this note is to provide current information on the status of the two species in American Samoa, with brief notes on Western Samoa.

The Common Myna was first reported from American Samoa in October 1980, when a single individual was seen at the Rainmaker Hotel in Utulei, on the west side of Pago Pago Bay, Tutuila (Potter 1981) (see Fig. 1). This species was not present during extensive field surveys of American Samoan birds carried out during 1975 and 1976 (Amerson et al. 1982).

By 1985-'86, the species had spread, and was seen regularly around the harbor, the airport, and the heavily settled Tafuna Plain, west to Leone (Fig. 1), where a pair was seen (Engbring and Ramsey 1989). The largest flock noted was seven birds near the Rainmaker Hotel. Engbring and Ramsey (1989:73) noted, "It is unlikely that the population has reached a peak and we expect that it will grow in future years . . . We recommend that the population be eradicated . . . At present, the Common Myna is restricted to a relatively small area on Tutuila, and it should be possible to remove this small population."

No attempt at eradication was made. The observations reported here were made from

February 1992 to December 1993. The Common Myna is now common throughout the area reported by Engbring and Ramsey, extending from Pago Pago Harbor through the Tafuna Plain, and west to Leone. These are the most developed parts of the island, with significant areas of lawn, bare earth, and pavement, providing mynas with their favored foraging sites. Interestingly, the population has increased within the most suitable areas, but has not markedly expanded its range. I have never seen Common Mynas north of the central ridge of the island or east of Pago Pago Harbor. Although there are villages on the eastern part of Tutuila that seem to provide open areas sufficient to support mynas (e.g. Fagaitua, Tula; Fig. 1), the species has not yet moved along the narrow corridor provided by the coastal road to reach these areas.

The current size of the Common Myna population is unknown, but certainly exceeds 1000 birds. I have not located any large roosts. Flocks of 10-20 are common, especially in the Utulei and Tafuna areas. Breeding (indicated by the carrying of nesting material or food into holes) has been observed from Pago Pago to Leone.

The Common Myna thus appears to be

firmly established on Tutuila, and could be eradicated only with the greatest difficulty, if at all. Fortunately, this species has not yet reached the Manu'a Islands (Ofu, Olosega, and Ta'u) 60 miles east of Tutuila.

The Jungle Myna was first reported in American Samoa in July 1986, when four birds were seen at the airport in the Tafuna area of Tutuila (Engbring and Ramsey 1989). In July 1987, Engbring again saw a pair at the airport. He wrote, "The fact that birds have been on the island for at least a year, and that pairs appear to be present, would indicate that a population may soon be established. This species, perhaps more so than the Common Myna, has potential for disrupting native ecosystems because it is able to move into and use habitats that have many native components. We strongly recommend that an eradication program be initiated" (Engbring and Ramsey 1989:74).

No attempts at eradication were made. The Jungle Myna is now a well-established breeding bird on Tutuila, and may have a population even larger than that of the Common Myna. The species' range on Tutuila is very similar to that of the Common Myna: neither species yet occurs on the eastern or northern parts of the island. However, the

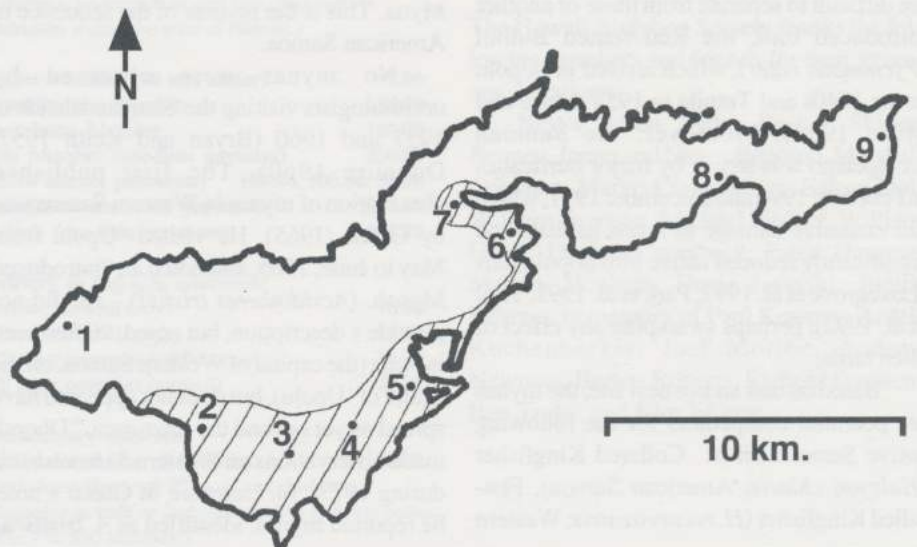


Figure 1. Range of Common and Jungle Mynas on Tutuila, American Samoa. Both species are found throughout the shaded area; only the Jungle Myna occurs as far west as Fagali'i. Neither myna has yet spread east of Pago Pago Bay. Most of the mountainous northern side of Tutuila is probably unsuitable for mynas because of dense forest and paucity of human settlements. Sites: 1-Fagali'i; 2-Leone; 3-Tafuna Plain; 4-airport and industrial park; 5-Utulei; 6-Pago Pago; 7-Fagaitua; 8-Tula.

range of the Jungle Myna extends farther west, and the centers of abundance of the two species are different. The Common Myna is most common in the relatively urbanized Pago Pago Bay area (sites 6 and 7, Fig. 1); the Jungle Myna predominates in the Futiga and Leone areas (sites 2 and 3, Fig. 1). It is particularly conspicuous at the Tutuila landfill, located in an area of young second growth and coconut plantations near Futiga. Flocks of 50-100 Jungle Mynas are often seen here, but Common Mynas are infrequently seen, and never in large numbers. Both species are common in the Tafuna area, around the airport and the nearby Daniel K. Inouye Industrial Park (sites 4 and 5, Fig. 1). In September 1992, Jungle Mynas were observed west of Leone for the first time, in the village of Afao. By June 1993 they had spread to Fagali'i at the far western end of Tutuila (site 1, Fig. 1), where they are apparently breeding.

I have never seen either myna during bird surveys in primary and well-developed secondary forest habitats on Tutuila. However, Jungle Mynas occur in secondary forest on the island of 'Upolu, Western Samoa, located 60 miles west of Tutuila. Jungle Mynas probably reached 'Upolu in the early to mid-1960s (see discussion below). It is possible that as myna populations continue to expand on Tutuila, the Jungle Myna, at least, will invade forest habitats and come into more direct conflict with native bird species.

The effects to date of the two myna species on native bird populations in Samoa are unknown. On Midway, where seabird eggs are abundant and other resources are scarce, Common Mynas have been observed to prey on the eggs and young of White Terns (*Gygis alba*) and Black Noddies (*Anous tenuirostris*) (Grant 1982). This has not been observed on Tutuila. The effects of the mynas are difficult to separate from those of another introduced bird, the Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*), which arrived in 'Upolu in the 1940s and Tutuila in 1958 (Muse and Muse 1982). Moreover, the Samoan archipelago was struck by major hurricanes in February 1990 and December 1991, which did extensive damage to forest habitats and significantly reduced native bird populations (Lovegrove et al. 1992, Park et al. 1992, Trail et al. 1992), perhaps swamping any effect of alien birds.

Based on diet and/or nest site, the mynas are potential competitors for the following native Samoan birds: Collared Kingfisher (*Halcyon chloris*; American Samoa), Flat-billed Kingfisher (*H. recurvirostris*; Western

Samoa); Samoan Starling (*Aplonis atrifusca*); Polynesian Starling (*A. tabuensis*); and Wattle Honeyeater (*Foulehaio carunculata*); as well as for the wintering Pacific Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*).

The native bird that appears to be most similar to the Jungle Myna in its ecology and behavior is the confamilial Samoan Starling (*Aplonis atrifusca*), a species endemic to the Samoan islands. Like the myna, the starling nests in tree cavities and has an opportunistic diet of fruit and insects. Watling (1982:104) commented, "It will be interesting to see if the Samoan Starling, which is an aggressive bird, in any way checks the spread of the recently introduced Jungle Mynah, on 'Upolu." The abundance of the Jungle Myna on 'Upolu today suggests that the starling has had little or no effect on its spread. On the other hand, the Samoan Starling continues to be a common species on 'Upolu, even in suburban and agricultural habitats where the Jungle Myna is most abundant. However, no data are available on starling abundance before and after the introduction of the mynas in Western Samoa.

Given the proximity of the Manu'a Islands to Tutuila, the further spread of the mynas in American Samoa is possible. It is important that a vigorous eradication campaign be mounted as soon as mynas (or bulbuls) are detected on these islands, which are as yet free from introduced bird species.

Notes on the Jungle Myna and Common Myna in Western Samoa

The history of the Common and Jungle Mynas in Western Samoa is confused because of problems with the identification of the two species. However, a review of the literature makes it clear that the Jungle Myna reached Western Samoa well before the Common Myna. This is the reverse of the sequence in American Samoa.

No mynas were observed by ornithologists visiting the Samoan islands in 1957 and 1960 (Bryan and Keith 1957; Dunmire 1960). The first published observation of mynas in Western Samoa was by Green (1965). He visited 'Upolu from May to June, 1965, and noted an "introduced Mynah, (*Acridotheres tristis*?)." He did not provide a description, but noted, "Often seen in Apia (the capital of Western Samoa, on the island of 'Upolu), but does not appear to have spread as yet beyond the town area." Dhondt made observations on Western Samoan birds during 1973-'74. Unaware of Green's note, he reported mynas, identified as *A. tristis*, as

a new record, characterizing them as "well established," but also noting that they occurred in the Apia area only (Dhondt 1976). The first definite report of the Jungle Myna on Western Samoa was by Watling (1978). He noted that, *contra* Dhondt (1976), the myna found in Apia was the Jungle Myna. During 1978, Child (1979) confirmed Watling's identification, and noted, "We saw only a few small groups of up to six birds in the environs of Apia . . . none were seen elsewhere around the coasts or in the hill forests. . . it seems to be rather uncommon and localized." Finally, Muse and Muse (1982) present a photograph of *Acridotheres fuscus*, correctly identified by scientific name. The description, however, mentions bare yellow skin behind the eye; this is a character of the Common Myna, not the Jungle Myna. The vernacular name given is simply "Myna."

The first authenticated record of the Common Myna for Western Samoa dates from 1988 (Beichle 1989). Beichle, who worked on Western Samoa from 1977-'84 without observing this species, reported that small numbers of *A. tristis* were seen throughout the Apia area from June-August 1988. He recorded a total of 24 birds, which he stated to be a minimum. He also noted that by 1988, in contrast to 1977-'84, Jungle Mynas were "seen all over 'Upolu."

I observed mynas in Western Samoa during several brief visits ('Upolu: 14-16 August, 1992, 15-17 September, 1992, 26-28 January, 1993, and 30 January-2 February, 1993; Savai'i: 28-29 January, 1993). During these visits, Jungle Mynas were abundant and conspicuous in Apia. They were also seen in well-developed secondary forest on Mt. Vaea on the outskirts of the city, and in villages and plantation land on the north, east, and south coasts, including Lalomanu and Togitogiga. Jungle Mynas were the only myna species observed on Savai'i, where small flocks were observed in Saleleloga, Tafua, and Sili in the southeastern corner of the island.

In contrast, the Common Myna was seen only in Apia, and was relatively uncommon. For example, I counted 41 Jungle Mynas but only 4 Common Mynas foraging on a rugby field in Apia on 17 September. It seems possible that the spread of the Common Myna on 'Upolu may have been inhibited by the already established Jungle Myna. Consistent with this, the Common Myna appears to be less common on 'Upolu than on Tutuila, despite the fact that Apia (population 35,000) offers more suitable urban habitats than do the smaller villages of Tutuila.

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Where Goes the 'Elepaio? We Need to Hear from You

by Lynne Matusow, Managing Editor

The Hawaii Audubon Society Board of Directors is evaluating the future role and format of the 'Elepaio. In this effort, we need to hear from you, the members of Hawaii Audubon. The 'Elepaio is the voice and representation of Hawaii Audubon.

As Hawaii Audubon continues to expand several of its educational and conservation programs, including the Paradise Pursuits environmental quiz show for high school students, oiled wildlife rehabilitation training, the awarding of research grants, and legislative action, your Board of Directors is struggling with how to pay for the increased expenses. We are continuing our fundraising activities and have applied to foundations for grants.

One of the cost items we are examining is the 'Elepaio. It costs more than \$6.40 per year per member to print and mail the 'Elepaio. This is the largest single budget item (\$18,000), at 20% of Hawaii Audubon's budget, and it will increase as the proposed new postage rates take effect.

Historically the 'Elepaio has published scientific articles, which normally would not appear elsewhere, blended with local environmental news and chapter events. As such, it is an important source of information on the conservation history of Hawaii.

The Hawaii Audubon Society Board of Directors needs to hear from you, the members, as we consider how to restructure the 'Elepaio to contain its costs. The Board is currently considering reducing the number of pages, the number of issues, or the focus of the publication. We welcome your input on this matter and urge you to complete the following questionnaire and return it no later than 1 May.

.....

I joined Hawaii Audubon because _____

I regularly read _____ don't read _____ the 'Elepaio

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If yes, how much more? _____

I am interested in seeing the following type of articles (please rate in order of importance, 1 being the most important and 5 the least):

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I would like the 'Elepaio to be printed (check one only):

_____ Monthly

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_____ 10 times a year, one issue for June and July and one issue for July and August

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Should the 'Elepaio be split into two publications, a two or four page newsletter and a scientific journal? Yes _____ No _____

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Send to: 'Elepaio Questionnaire, Hawaii Audubon Society, 1088 Bishop Street, Suite 808, Honolulu, HI 96813.

Conservation Update

by Andy Cowell

Hawaii Audubon Society has taken an active part in the on-going legislative session, testifying on a number of bills which would have an impact on Hawaii's native wildlife and ecosystems. Following is a summary of HAS's position on the most important legislation. Testimony is being given by Suzanne Marinelli, who is monitoring all environmental legislation this session.

Senate Bill 3067 seeks to rewrite the law governing conservation districts in Hawaii. HAS and others have suggested a number of changes to the bill. The new bill would make it harder for individual citizens, as opposed to the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), to file suit and to legally enforce conservation district regulations. HAS argued for the right of all citizens to participate in government in order to aid in enforcement. In addition, HAS pushed for the inclusion of language to recognize and protect cultural as well as natural resources. Finally, HAS argued for language which would prohibit golf courses and resort developments on conservation lands.

Senate Bill 2659 seeks to reduce the time available for public comment on Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) from 45 days to 30 days. HAS argued that this 33% reduction would significantly affect the quality and completeness of the EIS, and noted that there is often some delay in actually making the EIS available on the official "Day 1" and thereafter, so that the final 15 days are often vital for providing the public an adequate response time.

In a similar but even more frightening vein, Senate Bill 2477 seeks to limit the rights of citizens to file suits on environmental matters. HAS is strongly opposed to this legislation. In fact, the central problem of all three bills discussed to this point is that they seek to limit and/or reduce the general public's ability to participate in the decision-making process on matters concerning the environment, and also to limit the public's ability to enforce the laws and regulations which come out of this process. Since environmental issues affect every one of us, and much of the affected air, land, and water is part of the public domain, HAS will continue to strongly oppose efforts to reduce the public's control over its own environment and its own government in favor of narrow special interests.

House Bill 3438 seeks to create a Depart-

ment of the Environment within the state government. HAS testified in support of this bill, noting that Hawaii is now one of just seven states without such a department. We did however testify that the Environmental Center should remain under the jurisdiction of the University of Hawaii, to protect it from politicization, and also to ensure that this resource remains available to all students and faculty at the University.

Finally, HAS successfully argued against a series of bills which would have mandated that the DLNR maintain huntable populations of pigs throughout its lands. These "right to hunt" bills would actually lead to the elimination of the right to gather native plants, hike among indigenous forests, and fish at natural reefs because of the destruction and erosion caused by the pigs. HAS does not oppose hunting, and is not proposing the elimination of pigs, but it believes that there are many resources which must be protected in Hawaii's forests in addition to the pigs. All of Hawaii's major environmental groups and representatives of native Hawaiians, including Ka Lahui Hawai'i, opposed these bills.

HAS has also joined more than a dozen environmental and citizen's groups in petitioning the Federal Aviation Administration to adopt regulations to control noise from low flying aircraft in Hawaii. Many scientists believe that the noise is having an adverse effect on wildlife, particularly Hawaii's native forest birds, many of which are threatened and endangered.

Mahalo Castle & Cooke Homes

Castle and Cooke Homes Hawaii, Inc., has generously given Hawaii Audubon an IBM computer. This much appreciated gift will enable us to merge the National Audubon and Hawaii Audubon only membership lists, giving us a complete data bank in the office.

Paradise Pursuits

At press time, Lahainaluna High School had won the Maui competition and will participate in the semi-finals in April. The other competitions had not yet taken place.

For a complete list of the revised KHON-TV2 broadcast schedule, see Calendar on page 24.

Curious Albatross

by Steve Carter

On 22 December, 1993 a project was started to establish a Laysan Albatross breeding colony by placing decoys, representing 30 adult albatross and 7 chicks, on Kaohikaipu Island. Scott Hull, from National Audubon Society, started training volunteer observers on 12 January, 1994. Since that time 24 volunteers have signed up and are observing on a regular basis.

The response by albatross to the decoys has been very encouraging. Very few visitations were expected in this first year of the project, but albatross have become frequent visitors to the decoy groups. The greatest number of birds on the ground at one time so far is four.

The project continues to be upgraded. On 27 January, 19 more decoys were added to the set. These decoys improved realism and visibility of the site. On 9 February, radios were installed to monitor the sound system.

Sea Life Park started receiving live albatross chicks in early February and is hand feeding the ravenous little ones at their bird rehabilitation facility. As many as 20 chicks may be raised if all of the eggs hatch.

Scott Hull has gone to another project on the Big Island. The coordination of the project is now being handled by Steve Carter of Hawaii Audubon and Ken McDermond of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The project will run until 16 May. We can still use some volunteers for observing. If you can donate 3 hours of time on a scheduled basis contact the Hawaii Audubon Office, 528-1432.

Network for Birders Suggested

At the February membership meeting, several members suggested that HAS establish a list of birders who would be interested in informal trips with other members. This would offer members the chance to find others to go along with them on their outings—for the sake of safety, to share information on good spots, or simply to increase the fun. If you are interested in putting your name on such a list, which would be circulated to all those on the list, call or write HAS, attention Andy Cowell.

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The Hawaii Audubon Society has a stock of T-shirts designed to spread the Audubon message. Not only are they attractive personal apparel, but they make excellent presents as well.

T-shirts bearing the Society's 'Elepaio logo are available in ash (gray) with a black design. We also have a few in aqua, navy, white, and beige. In addition, the "hot" Kolea (Pacific Golden Plover) T-shirts are also available. This T-shirt is white with a three-color design of the Kolea and native hibiscus. Proceeds from the Kolea T-shirt go to help HAS fund research on shorebirds in Hawai'i and elsewhere in the Pacific region.

T-shirts are \$12 each, plus \$2.00 per shirt for postage. They are available in medium, large, and extra large adult sizes only. When ordering T-shirts, be sure to list size and first, second, and third choice of color. To order T-shirts send your check, payable to the Hawaii Audubon Society, to Yvonne Izu, 1957 Alai Place, Wahiawa, HI 96786. Don't forget to add \$2.00 per shirt for postage. Insufficient postage will delay your order until the proper amount is remitted. T-shirts are not available at the HAS office.

Scholarship Available

The Hawaii Audubon Society will be awarding one undergraduate tuition scholarship of \$1,460 to a Hawaii resident attending the University of Hawaii for the 1994-'95 school year. This scholarship, named the Rose Schuster Taylor Scholarship, is made available by the Yao Shen Trust, in honor of Rose Schuster Taylor. Terms of the trust require that the recipient be a Hawaii resident, attending the University of Hawaii, whose area of study is related to Hawaiian natural history, especially if it may lead to the better protection of native wildlife in Hawaii.

Applicants should submit the following information: name, address, telephone number, class year, and explain how their academic major relates to Hawaiian natural history. They should also discuss how they plan to apply their academic degree to further study or work experience in Hawaiian natural history, how their course of study will enable them to contribute to the better protection of native Hawaiian wildlife, and if they have made contributions to the study of Hawaiian natural history, especially to anything that might contribute to the protection of native wildlife.

Applicants should attach a transcript of their college or high school records and three letters of recommendation.

Applications should be sent to Phil Bruner, Chair, Scholarships and Grants Committee, Box 1775, BYU-H, La'ie, HI 96762, telephone 293-3820 (W). The application deadline is 1 May.

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Calendar of Events

First Monday of Every Month

Monthly meeting of the Conservation Committee, 6:30 p.m., at the Coffee Line, 1820 University Avenue (in the YWCA). To join call David Hill, 988-7460 (H).

Monday, April 11

Board meeting, 7:00 p. m., HAS office.

Monday, April 18

General Membership Meeting, Paki Conference Room, Bishop Museum, 7:30 p.m. Earthtrust will present a slide presentation on its work with Pacific whales. Refreshments will be served.

Saturday, April 16

KHON-TV-2 broadcast of Paradise Pursuits semi-finals, round 1, 2:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Sunday, April 17

KHON-TV2 broadcast of Paradise Pursuits semi-finals, round 2, 4:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Saturday, April 23

KHON-TV2 Broadcast of Paradise Pursuits finals, 7:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, April 30

Field trip to Hakalau Forest NWR on the windward slopes of Mauna Kea. Home to endangered Hawaiian forest birds. Registration required. Limited to 25 participants. Meet at Hilo Airport at 6:30 a.m. Bring warm clothing, water, lunch, binoculars, hiking shoes/boots, rain gear. Approximate vehicle rental cost \$25 per participant. Special request for Big Islanders with 4-wheel drive vehicles. To register call Lance Tanino weeknights on O'ahu, 247-5965 (H). Leader: Jack Jeffrey, USFWS biologist. Suggested donation: \$2.00.

Saturday, May 7

Field trip to Red-footed Booby Colony at Ulupau Head, Kane'ohē Marine Corps Air Station, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. led by Mark Rauzon. Military security requires advance registration. Limited to 25 participants. To register call Lance Tanino weeknights after April 18, 247-5965 (H). Suggested donation: \$2.00.

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Moving?

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