

O'ahu 'Elepaio Nest and Population in Pia Valley

by Vaughn Sherwood¹

On 6 June 1994, I discovered an active O'ahu 'Elepaio (*Chasiempis sandwichensis gayi*) nest in Pia Valley, roughly 0.8 km north of trail head, at approximately 175 m in elevation. The nest was roughly 12 m high, near the top of a mango (*Mangifera indica*) tree in the ephemeral stream bed. The discovery came after I spent three days observing and photographing adults coming and going from the tree. The nest was confirmed to be an active nest by Sheila Conant on 8 June, and she determined that the nest was in the incubation stage, because the adult birds were taking turns sitting on the nest and not nest building or feeding young. On our way to and from the nest site that day, Conant and I discovered a sub-adult at trail side, often as close as 5 m, foraging by shaking leaves of guava (*Psidium guajava*) trees.

When I returned on 15 June, activity at

the nest site had changed from incubation to feeding of young. On 23 June, 1994 I first observed an 'Elepaio nestling with grey-black down and pink-orange throat. On 26 June, 1994 activity at the nest had ceased and a fledgling was seen in an adjacent guava tree. By midday, it had flown approximately 50 m to the east side of the dry stream bed to a small guava sapling where I photographed it (Fig. 1). From there it moved to a dense thicket, where another fledgling was seen. A sub-adult 'Elepaio was also seen nearby. The fact that the adult bird seen in Fig. 1 was feeding the youngster suggests that it was one of the parents. On 27 June at 9 a.m., a chick was seen on the west side of the stream, roughly 20 m from the trail. It flew to an adjacent tree, then flew again, but stayed in the area until 4:30 p.m. At all locations, the chick was seen being fed by adults, often as frequently as once per minute. On 29 June the chick was more difficult to locate, and flew more frequently

than before. At around 4 p.m., I feared that the chick had become separated from the adults, but my early morning observations of 30 June confirmed that chick feeding was occurring. Rather than disturb the birds while the chicks were able to fly longer distances and possibly far enough from the adults to disrupt the feeding, I decided to wait until 8 July to continue my observations. On 8 July I saw only a glimpse of an adult and heard calls only five times. When I approached a calling area, the birds apparently flew to other trees, so I discontinued my surveillance on that day.

When Eric VanderWerf and I came to the nest site on 21 July no 'Elepaio adults or chicks could be seen or heard, even after more than one hour of surveillance. VanderWerf and I then hiked up the trail and dry stream bed and saw two pair of 'Elepaio before reaching the stream fork. VanderWerf continued on to the end of the western fork of the ephemeral stream and reported seeing five more pairs.

All in all, he counted 17 'Elepaio that day, although I cannot be sure if either of us saw the same birds from the original nest site.

All activities that I observed at the nest site occurred within an area no larger than 75 m by 60 m and within 50 m of the nest. The chicks were within an area in which the adults were flying and foraging earlier in the month, while the eggs and nestlings were still in the nest.

Conant (1977) reported that the O'ahu 'Elepaio's breeding season extended from January through June. The discovery of this nest, which fledged two young, as well as D. Woodside's observation (pers. comm. to S. Conant) of fledglings in early July (1994) in Halawa Valley, O'ahu suggests that the breeding season extends through July. It is also possible that high winds and torrential rains in February and March of 1994 may have contributed to an unsuccessful ini-



Fig. 1. O'ahu 'Elepaio adult and fledgling photographed 26 June, 1994. Photo © Vaughn Sherwood.

tial nesting attempt, and that this nest was perhaps a re-nesting after a first nest was destroyed.

'Elepaio were observed in Pia Valley on 19 December, 1993, during the Audubon Christmas bird count by Andy Cowell and by myself on 6 March, 1994. I saw one adult 'Elepaio on the adjacent western Hawaii Loa Ridge on 27 February, 1994, and the Christmas count also discovered 'Elepaio on this ridge. 'Elepaio have been mostly seen along the valley trail and stream in Pia Valley. The valley and ridge populations may be linked by dispersal and perhaps make up one large population, but further observations are needed to confirm if there is such a link.

The Pia Valley nest site does not occur within the State Forest Reserve but rather on private land. Although O'ahu 'Elepaio have slightly increased from six birds counted in the 1992 Christmas count to 12 birds counted in 1993, the fifty-year record indicates a strong downward trend in the past 10-20 years in the Honolulu area (Williams 1987). According to Ellis et al. (1992), its Mace-Lande status category of threat is "critical" which suggests that there is a 50% probability of extinction within five years or two generations, whichever is longer, and its population is estimated to be between 200-500.

On 21 March, 1994, a petition to list the O'ahu 'Elepaio as either endangered or threatened was submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The USFWS is actively pursuing the proper course of action required to make the decision whether to list this subspecies.

I would be grateful to those who see or have made recent sightings of O'ahu 'Elepaio, if they would call me at 523-397 and leave a message concerning the locations, so that I might compile a more complete biogeography of the O'ahu 'Elepaio.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Lance Tanino for the detailed description of 'Elepaio sites in the 1993 Christmas count published in the March 1994 'Elepaio. I would further like to thank Andy Cowell for describing the area in Pia Valley where he saw 'Elepaio during the same count. I would like to thank Sheila Conant for accompanying me on 8 July, 1994, and for assistance in writing this account. Lastly, I would like to thank Eric VanderWerf for accompanying me on 21 July and for venturing beyond the area where I could go. Without his help, the presence of 'Elepaio beyond the nest site would still remain undiscovered.

Literature Cited

Conant, Sheila. (1977) The breeding biology of

O'ahu 'Elepaio in Trouble

By Andy Cowell

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service USFWS) is considering listing the O'ahu subspecies of the 'Elepaio (*Chasiempis sandwichensis gayi*) as threatened or endangered. Information is being compiled to aid in the preparation of a proposed rule to list the bird.

The O'ahu 'Elepaio was formerly common and widespread on the island, being noted on virtually all HAS field trips into appropriate habitat in the 1950s and 1960s. However, the population appears to have declined dramatically in the course of the 1970s and 1980s. Among the sources being used to document this decline are the field trip reports published in the 'Elepaio, as well as data from the annual Christmas bird counts. Based on this and other data, it is estimated that only 200-500 birds survive on the island.

Despite this data, the actual range and numbers of the O'ahu 'Elepaio were until recently extremely uncertain, based in large part on incidental reports. During the past few months however, a team of volunteers from Hawaii Audubon Society and the University of Hawaii has been conducting a systematic search of the island to obtain better information on the current status of the bird. The news has been both good and bad. On the negative side, the searchers have been unable to find birds at sites that were formerly reliable localities, such as Poamoho Trail and the Aiea Loop and Ridge trails. The bird does still exist in both the Ko'olau and Waianae Mountains, however, and one positive aspect of the search has been the discovery of larger-than-expected populations of the bird in some areas of the southeastern Ko'olau Mountains adjacent to Honolulu.

If and when the 'Elepaio is declared threatened or endangered, it will join a long

the O'ahu 'Elepaio. Wilson Bulletin 89:193-210.
Ellis, S., C. Kuehler, R. Lacy, K. Hughes, and U.S. Seal. (1992) Hawaii Forest Birds Conservation Assessment and Management Plan. Hilo: Captive Breeding Specialist Group.
Williams, R.N. (1987) Alien Birds on O'ahu: 1944-1985. 'Elepaio 47:87-92.

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list of similar O'ahu birds, plants, and snails. Forest birds which have gone extinct on O'ahu since the arrival of western explorers include the 'Amaui (a thrush), the O'ahu 'O'o, the O'ahu 'Akepa, the O'ahu 'Akialoa, the O'ahu Nukupu'u, and the 'O'u, while there have been few if any recent reliable reports of the O'ahu Creeper or 'Iwi on the island. Although habitat destruction and mosquito-borne diseases transmitted from alien birds seem to have been the most likely causes of many of these extinctions, it is unclear why the 'Elepaio has declined. Permission has been received from the state to begin a banding project to help suggest answers to this sad but familiar situation.

Persons with information regarding the O'ahu 'Elepaio which could be of use in the ongoing evaluation process should contact Loyal Mehrhoff, USFWS, 541-3441.

Albatross Update

by Andy Cowell

The Laysan Albatross Project, which is attempting to establish a nesting colony of Laysan Albatross on Kaohikaipu Island near Sea Life Park, continues to go well. Approximately 40 volunteers are involved with the project, which will continue through the first week of May.

It is clear that no albatross will breed on the island this year, but this was expected by project head Dr. Stephen Kress. The aim this year has been to use the albatross decoys and sound system to attract as many prospecting juvenile birds as possible, in the hope that they will return to breed in the near future. In this respect, the project has demonstrated marked improvement from last year in attracting passing albatross. In 76 days of observing since the first sighting on 10 December, 1994, Laysan Albatross were seen in the area on 30 days (39%), with landings on the island occurring on 19 days (25%). Last year at this time, in approximately 50 days of observing, albatross were seen 14 times (28%), with landings on 10 of those days (20%).

These are only rough figures. Differences in weather, daily observing time and so forth must be considered. But the project seems headed in the right direction. Certainly Steve Kress and myself would like to express our appreciation to the HAS volunteers who contributed many hours to the project.

O'ahu Paradise Pursuits Preliminaries: Competitive Spirit Sparks Games

Conservation Update



Victorious Kamehameha Schools team and coaches. Photo © Wendy Johnson.

by Wendy Johnson

February marked the beginning of the 1995 Paradise Pursuits competition season with preliminary matches on O'ahu which included excellent teams from nine high schools here. On 18 February, McKinley, St. Louis, Mililani, and Moanalua High Schools met at Ho'omaluhia Botanical Garden for two rounds of play. The students fielded quiz questions from the following four Paradise Pursuits study categories: Hawaii's native species, alien species, natural history, and human impacts on the environment. The Moanalua students, identified by their team name *Mano* which means shark in Hawaiian, remained undefeated after a close contest with the Mililani team in the second round of play.

Moanalua returned the following weekend to join the final day of O'ahu competitions held at La Pietra, Hawaii School for Girls, Castle, Iolani, Kahuku, Kalani, and Kamehameha High Schools were also on hand to test their skills in the Paradise Pursuits arena. Individual students on several of the teams were repeat players, whose experience really paid off in the heat of competition. Teams which had faced each other in previous years were pleased to get a chance to meet "at the buzzers" again.

Volunteer judges and game staff from the Hawaii Audubon Society were impressed with the students' knowledge and poise. After five separate games covering a wide range of

subject matter, one team remained undefeated on O'ahu. The team from Kamehameha, called *Hui Lama* which is the name of their school's hiking club, was given a tough final match by the Iolani team, but Kamehameha proved up to the challenge. Kamehameha Schools is, for the third consecutive year, the O'ahu Paradise Pursuits champion and will be competing against winners from Maui, Kaua'i, and Hawai'i in semi-final and final matches to be taped at the KITV studios on 8 April. State-wide broadcast of the finals will be Saturday, 15 April at 6 p.m.

Congratulations to all the O'ahu Paradise Pursuits participants who did a fine job of preparation and performance under pressure. O'ahu contestants received prizes generously donated by: Waimea Falls Park, Kualoa Ranch and Activities Club, Royal Hawaiian Cruises, Earthtrust, Hawaii Nature Center, and local author and Paradise Pursuits judge, Susan Scott.

Birders Network

HAS has a list of birders who are interested in informal trips with other members, allowing members 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 the list, which would be circulated to all those on the list, call or write HAS, attention Andy Cowell.

by Andy Cowell

As was the case last year, Hawaii Audubon Society has hired a part-time lobbyist to represent us during this legislative session. This year, that person is Bart Dame, who has worked extensively with a number of organizations in Hawaii in the past. He has already presented testimony on a number of bills. Among those which HAS is following closely is a bill to bring the state's endangered species law into line with the Federal law by allowing for an incidental take provision. This would give the state the authority to permit the destruction of a few individuals of an endangered species when such an act would not threaten the species as a whole. In exchange, action would be taken to secure better protection for the remaining population. HAS has worked to ensure that in exchange for this alteration of the state law, an additional provision be included in the bill to allow for private citizens to sue should the terms of the incidental take provision be violated.

HAS has also been participating in a series of sessions known as the Natural Areas Working Group (NAWG), represented by Suzanne Marinelli until recently. These sessions, meeting on the Big Island, have involved hunters, environmentalists, local citizens, and representatives from the state government in a forum to discuss issues regarding pig hunting and the place of pigs in Hawaii forests. The sessions have led to a number of points of consensus between hunters and environmentalists, in contrast to the acrimonious relationship between these two groups in the recent past. HAS has sought to reach accords that recognize the need to protect certain pristine forests from pig damage, while at the same time insuring adequate hunting opportunities. The common thread that binds our efforts in both the legislature and the NAWG sessions has been the need to protect the best of Hawaiian native ecosystems, while also avoiding costly and often fruitless conflicts when compromises are available which will still protect the integrity of our natural world.

Undergraduate Scholarship Available

The Hawaii Audubon Society will be awarding one undergraduate tuition scholarships of \$1,534 to a Hawaii resident attending the University of Hawaii for the 1995-'96 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.

Birding in Hawaii

A two-page guide listing areas on O'ahu where interesting birds may be found and where access is not a problem is now available. Written by Peter Donaldson, it offers important information for birders unfamiliar with Hawai'i. The guide is not designed to give detailed directions or information on bird identification. Also available is a guide to birding in the Hawaiian Islands which highlights birding spots on several islands. For a free copy, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to Hawaii Audubon Society, 1088 Bishop Street, Suite 808, Honolulu, HI 96813, indicating which two page guide you want.

Captive Propagation Facility to Be Built for Hawaii's Forest Birds

Officials from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Peregrine Fund World Center for Birds of Prey, and Kamehameha Schools Bishop Estate (KSBE) have announced plans for a \$4 million captive propagation facility for Hawaiian forest birds on the Big Island. Construction will begin immediately and is divided into four phases. The facility will include a captive propagation complex, five large forest bird buildings, five 'Alala aviaries, a clinic, a workshop, and staff residences.

The Peregrine Fund, based in Boise, ID, will construct and operate the facility on approximately 100 acres of land made available by KSBE near Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park in Ka'u. The USFWS will provide funding for most of the construction and half of the operational costs.

"The need for a captive propagation facility to work in association with the state's Olinda Endangered Species Facility on Maui is highlighted in almost all native forest bird

recovery plans", said KSBE Trustee Richard Wong.

Hawaii was once the home of about 140 species of native birds. At least 70 of those species are extinct. Thirty others are endangered, with 12 of those dangerously close to extinction.

Since 1993, the USFWS, local land owners, the Peregrine Fund, The State of Hawaii, the Hawaii Audubon Society, and others have been working to conserve the endangered 'Alala or Hawaiian Crow. Through this effort the wild population of 'Alala has increased from a low of nine to an estimated 20 birds. The 'Alala will be one of the first species included in the new facility.

Robert Smith, USFWS Pacific Islands Ecoregion Manager, said, "although our initial focus will be the 'Alala, a number of other rare Hawaiian forest birds may eventually be helped by this facility." Initial candidates include the Oma'o (Hawaiian Thrush), Common 'Amakihi, and Puaiohi (Small Kaua'i Thrush).

HAS Publications

Hawaii's Birds by the Hawaii Audubon Society, 4th edition, 1993. Over 150 color photographs and illustrations. \$11.50 per copy (\$9.95 plus \$1.55 postage).

Please add \$1.00 for postage and handling for orders on the following:

Checklist of the Birds of Hawaii—1992 by R.L. Pyle. Lists all taxa naturally occurring in Hawai'i and introduced species that have established viable populations. Also includes all changes from the 1983 checklist. \$2.00.

Checklist of the Birds of the Mariana Islands by James D. Reichel and Philip O. Glass, 1991. Lists all taxa naturally occurring in the Marianas and introduced species that have established viable populations. \$2.00.

Field Card of the Birds of Hawaii by R.L. Pyle and A. Engilis, Jr., 1987. A pocket-sized field card listing bird taxa found in Hawai'i, with space for field trip notes. \$.25; five or more, \$.20/copy.

Endangered Waterbirds of the Hawaiian Is-

lands by R.J. Shallenberger, 1978. Hawaiian Stilt, Coot, Gallinule (Moorhen), and Duck, each described in two pages of photographs and text. \$1.00.

Posters, 43 x 56 cm., \$1.00 each.

Our Homes are Hawaii's Wetlands, 1984. Native wildlife of a Hawaiian marshland. *Hawaiian Forests Are More Than Trees*, 1988. Hawaiian forest plants, invertebrates, birds, and the Hawaiian hoary bat. Booklet included.

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T-shirts bearing the Society's 'Elepaio logo are available in blue spruce and mountain rose with a black design. We also have a few in ash (gray). 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.

Research Grants

The Hawaii Audubon Society makes grants for research in Hawaiian or Pacific natural history. Awards generally do not exceed \$500 and are oriented toward small-scale projects within Hawaii. Special consideration will be given to those applicants studying dryland forests and aeolian systems on Hawai'i.

The deadlines for receipt of grant applications are 1 April and 1 October. For an application form send a self-addressed stamped envelope to Grants, Hawaii Audubon Society, 1088 Bishop Street, Suite 808, Honolulu, HI 96813. For more information, call Phil Bruner, (808) 293-3820 (W).

Notice to Authors

'Elepaio invites submission of original scientific articles of between 1,500 and 3,000 words on the natural history of Hawaii and the Pacific. Articles are subject to peer review.

Scientific articles should be typewritten and double-spaced. Four copies must be submitted. In addition, authors whose articles are accepted for publication will be asked to submit the article on a 3.5 inch computer diskette, with a clear indication of the word processing program used.

We do all layouts directly on the computer. For that reason, authors are asked to adhere to the following guidelines: only one space after periods; no indentations, except for paragraphs and tables; no underlines, if on a diskette underlines should be shown as italics; no bold face type; use upper and lower case, nothing is to be in all capital letters; Hawaiian glottals should be used; capitalization for all bird species should follow American Ornithologists' Union nomenclature; dates should be shown as date, month, year; and the address of all authors should be included.

Photographs/illustrations may be either color or black-and-white prints, 3.5 by 5 inches or larger. They should be clearly labelled as to subject and photographer/artist. Cropping lines (if needed) should be indicated. The originals of figures, maps, graphs, etc. should be clean and clear, with lettering large enough to remain legible after reduction to fit journal format. Submit two good-quality xerographic copies with each original.

Manuscripts should be sent to 'Elepaio, Hawaii Audubon Society, 1088 Bishop Street, Suite 808, Honolulu, HI 96813.

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Calendar of Events

First Tuesday 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 or for more information call Andy Cowell, 944-6421 (H).

First Wednesday of Every Month

Monthly meeting of the Education Committee, 7:00 p.m., at the Coffee Line, 1820 University Avenue (in the YWCA). To join or for more information call Emily Gardner, 734-3921 (H). The Committee is actively seeking new members. All are welcome.

Monday, April 10

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

Saturday, April 15

Paradise Pursuits finals 6 p.m. televised by KITV-4. See article on page 19.

Monday, April 17

General meeting, 7:30 p.m. Paki Conference Room, Bishop Museum. Phil Bruner will give a presentation on comparisons of bird faunas between inhabited and uninhabited

islands in the central and southeastern Pacific. His presentation will focus on man's influence and impact on bird communities on Easter Island, Pitcairn Island, and others. Slides illustrating the talk will be shown. Refreshments will be served.

At press time a field trip had not been scheduled. Please call the office, 528-1432, after 1 April for details on the April trip.

Your Bequest Can Help

A bequest to the Hawaii Audubon Society is an excellent way to help in our conservation efforts. George C. Munro, enthusiastic and tireless field ornithologist and naturalist, provided for a fund to be used exclusively for the protection of native dry forests. Today, the George C. Munro Fund provides money for research projects on such forests.

For more information contact the Hawaii Audubon Society, 1088 Bishop Street, Suite 808, Honolulu, HI 96813, (808) 528-1432.

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