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FACTS ABOUT BIRDS By George C. Munro

Correcting some mis-information commonly held and even published as: It is sometimes stated in print that albatrosses cannot or do not dive. On the way to Midway Islands in June, and on the way back in July and August 1891 I saw the blackfooted albatross (Diomedea nigripes) dive several times. Mr. H. C. Palmer who was in charge of the expedition told me he saw them dive when I was not present. (ELEPAIO, Vol. 2, Nos. 8 and 10).

Recently I saw it stated that the frigate bird (Fregata minor palmerstoni) does not alight on the water or if it did it could not rise again. Anyone who has studied the frigate bird on land would conclude that this is so, but on July 1, 1891 while camped beside the lagoon on Lisiansky Island I watched the frigates chasing one another for tern chicks which they had picked up on the island. As soon as one picked up a chick the parent bird gave chase and the hawk flew out over the water with several others following it. The chick was dropped repeatedly, a different bird catching it nearly every time. This is probably to kill it before swallowing. The chick often falls into the water. My journal says: "I saw one today whilst three or four of them had a chick. It fell into the water and the hawk instead of picking it up without touching the water with anything but its bill, as they usually do, alighted on the water and sat there for some seconds." This was on the smooth water of the lagoon. I did not note anything about its effort in rising but if it had difficulty I should have noticed it as it was so unusual for them to alight on the water. Captain W. G. Anderson who has spent most of his life around islands where the frigate bird abounds and is a good bird observer says he has seen the frigate bird alight on the water.

It is generally supposed that the Pacific golden plover (Pluvialis dominica fulva) does not rest in its long migratory flight from Alaska or Siberia to Hawaii. This is probably generally the case. Where there are islands the birds pass from one to another as they seem to appear in July on Midway and Niihau and few are on the larger islands before August. But the plover can alight on the water and birds that become detached from the flocks and lose their way undoubtedly do this. On August 11, 1891 my journal states: "A kolea with black spotted breast flew round for some time. It seemed tired and wanted to alight on board coming down very close; it would fly away to a distance and then return. On one occasion when pretty close it lowered itself and alight on the water, sitting for a few seconds, then rose and dropped again twice, apparently to rest its wings. Three terns chased it at last." This bird had started back before it had changed its breeding plumage. We were perhaps 100 miles from Kauai which we sighted four days after.

A recent statement in the ATLANTIC MONTHLY that the sooty tern (Sterna fuscata oahuensis) cannot alight on the water. I have seen a large flock of this species sitting on the water. It was stated that one had been tried at Midway Islands and its feathers became soaked and it drowned. This was evidently a young bird not fully fledged. I have seen a young sooty tern and a young Laysan albatross get waterlogged. Tame muscovy ducks when first hatched are fond of swimming in the water and can swim and dive for a long time before their down gets even a little wet. Later on when the feathers begin to sprout they have no inclination to take to the water and if put in they quickly get soaked. Some concern has been expressed lately on the effect of the disturbance of sooty tern on islands occupied by the armed forces. These birds are so prolific and their nesting season so long that there need be little concern on that score. They lay but one egg at a time but I am sure they lay several in a season. On October 3, 1940 on Mokumanu I made the following note: "On top the sooties are densely massed. Those nearest the south end had young well grown and the nests were as thick as possible everywhere. I saw three eggs touching one another and several more a few inches away, nests were generally a few inches apart." That day I took two specimens, a male and a female each sitting on an egg well advanced in incubation. The female had another nearly matured in her egg duct. So it would seem that the female joins the laying birds and leaves the male to care for the chick early in its life.

On the same date on Mokumanu I found that: "On the slope coming up where the noddies had held the ground in 1937 and 1938 the sooties had taken possession. The area was thickly covered with nests and the young just hatching from the eggs. On that day on Mokumanu there were sooties sitting on eggs, young just hatching and young well grown, each stage on a section of the island by itself. I do not know whether the noddies were driven away by the sooties or whether they had not returned. I am sure, however, that both species change their nesting places and this may account for the difference in counts between Mr. Fred Hadden and Dr. H. I. Fisher.

I have already told of the slight effect of bombing practice on burrowing birds such as the wedge-tailed shearwater but it would be much harder on birds which are in dense flocks on the surface as the noddies on Mana. Milton Sideris had banded there before the war and on a recent visit noted that the noddies were not so numerous as before the war. But as already noted they may have voluntarily changed their nesting place. I doubt that having been disturbed on their nests has had anything to do with the diminished number of noddies on Midway as reported by Fisher and Baldwin. On June 21, 1938 I took an egg from the nest of a noddy tern on Mokumanu and left it in my office till the 25th. When I tried to blow it I had to make a large hole in the side to take out a nearly matured chick which was still alive. I noted: "This is reassuring as chicks will not be lost if the birds are disturbed from their nests." At that time the airplanes were flying over Manana and practicing with machine guns at targets in the air when the birds would rise from their nests in a cloud and return when the planes passed.

To be continued

A TRIP TO HAWAII
By Lorin Gill

When the good ship HUMUULA docked at Hilo on the morning of December 27th, she disgorged, in addition to the usual sacks of potatoes and cold fish, a not too battered coupe replete with camping equipment; my mother, hilarious at the idea of really exploring Hawaii; my brother, recently home from the Philippines, and myself.

While the day was still young, we set out for Kamuela, via the Hamakua Coast. Pausing an hour at Akaka Falls, near Honomu, we saw several hill robins in the Kaliali bushes, and two apapane in the Ohia Lehua which borders the 420 foot waterfall. It is I think, perhaps the most beautiful sight on all Hawaii. The rest of the trip was almost entirely devoid of bird life, except for an occasional plover in the fields from Honokaa to Kamuela. Later that day, however, while en route to Mamaa, the old Sam Parker home, we disturbed several covey of quail.

The next day at Kukuihaele, while looking down into lovely Waipio valley, enclosed by the towering cliffs of the Kohalas and ending in surging surf at a black sand beach--we wondered what manner of birds might live those several thousand feet below. We picked our way slowly down the cobbled trail, pausing several times to appreciate the magnificence of it all and also to allow the mule trains, driven by friendly Hawaiians who doffed their hats and wished us a hearty "aloha" to pass.

Down two miles or so, in the little settlement of board shacks, a church, and enormous banyan, the hill robins seemed as numerous as the very leaves of the bushes; near the barnyard, the pigeons and mynahs also asserted themselves.

Beating off an attack by a ten pound poi dog - snow-white except for a black possum-like ring around its tail - we struck off into the forest and, guided by compass toward a glittering waterfall we had seen at the head of the valley, followed a trail which led us, every few yards, right into the rippling river. The slow trek through the jungle of guavas and lantana, over and under barbed wire fences, and in and out of the frigid water continued for several miles and brought us to the remains of several ancient heiaus, moss-encrusted and crumbling, sad reminders of the early days when Waipio was a thriving Hawaiian stronghold. One, against the north wall of the canyon was of good size, from it a well paved, but abandoned, native foot path zig-zagged up the face of the cliff, probably leading to well concealed burial caves.

As we approached the waterfall, the stones of the stream bed were white with guano, and our ears were assailed with the hoarse discordant cries of some two-score night herons which we had disturbed at their rests high in the kukui trees. They angrily scolded at us while we were having lunch, ceasing only when we left the spot and headed back for the foot of the pali. As we passed along the old mule trail beside the auwai, we flushed a bird which, though it was too far away for positive identification, appeared to be a nene.

The tittering white eyes were all around us in the cold clear dawn of the next morning as we broke camp in the woods by the edge of the Honokaa-Waimea road and prepared to leave for Honaunau, the ancient city of refuge on the Kona coast.

While crossing the waste lands of Parker Ranch, we stopped near Fuuwaawaa to take some pictures of Maui; it was then that we saw what I firmly believe to have been an Io - it was a solitary hawk-like bird perched on a gnarled ohia lehua stump. It was complacently watching a few scrub cattle and seemed quite oblivious of our presence. We went too fast through luxuriantly verdant North Kona to observe any birds, but we expected to have more time at Honaunau.

We paused briefly at Napoopoo to look at Captain Cook's monument which is situated on the far shore of Kealakekua Bay. While there, we noticed several tropic birds drifting lazily about the cliffs on the mauka side.

At Honaunau, we gazed in awe upon the ancient heiau and temple wall - majestic structures of lichen-encrusted lava marching in orderly piles to the very edge of the sea. I would estimate the wall's over-all length to be about three-eighths of a mile.

The next day, we lay in the hot sun and were lulled to sleep by the ceaseless drumming of the waves on the age-old pahoehoe. We studied the local bird life only when it happened to cross our very limited fields of vision. What a glorious life of idle vegetation! I did notice that day, however, that the mynahs at Honaunau seemed to have a much higher shriller note in their call than do their cousins of Oahu.

As we slept under the palms on the second night, our ears were assailed by a rapidly nearing series of grunts and snorts; aroused, we did battle with about a dozen porkers, ranging in size from Mama and Papa to the smallest piglet, who had arrived to dispute possession of our camp.

The next evening, New Year's Eve, as we made camp in a sheltered spot about fifty feet from the edge of Kilauea crater and huddled about our annoyingly smoky fire of dead ohia, the air seemed filled with darting rubies, each reflecting in full splendor the fast departing rays of the last sun of 1945 - the apapane in its native habitat. To our eyes they seemed no larger than humming birds, and yet they were so close. Long after the night shadows gathered in the depths of the crater they continued to fly out over it, seemingly undisturbed by our presence.

The next day, at the renowned black sands of Kalapana, the only winged creatures we saw, besides the ever-present mynahs, were the equally well known black flies of Kalapana. From there we headed for Hilo, by way of the Puna Coast - a beautiful drive, though the road is poor - pounding surf on one side; endless groves of gigantic puhala trees on the other.

During our over-night stop at the Hilo Hotel we certainly appreciated the soft beds. They were the first we had seen in five days.

Early the next morning, bound for Kamuela again, we started over the cross-island route between Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea. On the Hilo side of the pass, we could distinctly hear the clear notes of the apapane, even though the ohia lehua forests were several hundred feet from the road. The Waimea side of the saddle offered only an occasional plover.

We drove through Kamuela and on to Kohala, where we saw the original statue of Kamehameha -- much better kept and more natural in appearance than its counterpart in Honolulu. After a short jaunt down to Kawaihae, we again wound up in Kamuela to spend the night with friends--the beds at Hilo must have spoiled us for any more camping.

We drove into Hilo the next day and put Mother on the Honolulu bound plane. Then my brother and I prepared for the more strenuous part of our exertions.

That same day, we drove back along the volcano road as far as Mountain View and then turned off on a glorified pig-path which took us, after considerable labor on the part of the car, to Kulani, the site of the proposed territorial penitentiary. The prison road had been pushed, apparently without the slightest consideration for grade, right through the heart of the virgin timber, which consisted almost entirely of pulu ferns ten to twenty feet in height and ohia lehua trees reaching to the breathtaking height of one hundred and fifty feet. Never before had I seen any so tall or straight.

The evening's cool crisp air seemed alive with darting birds. Their cries, in the absence of all man-made noise, were almost deafening. As the lehua trees were so much taller than those at Kilauea, we were unable to study the birds at very close range. The apapane, however, was readily identified its flute-like note and its peculiar flight as it flitted from tree top to tree top. Nor did we have any difficulty in recognizing the amakihi's call. The songs of the other birds, of which there seemed to be at least four distinct types, were blended, surprisingly harmoniously, into one great crescendo of sound. One of those calls which we could not identify positively was somewhat like that of the great hornbill's, though not nearly so loud; it may have been that of the iiwi.

After spending a very cold, though not otherwise uncomfortable night at Kulani, during which we were again attacked by pigs, though this time they were definitely not of barnyard variety, we whisked down to Hilo, picked up a friend of my brother's and high-tailed it up the saddle road again, bound for the summit of Mauna Kea.

As the sun was low on the horizon, and as the now much battered coupe, due to the rarefied atmosphere, stubbornly refused to climb any higher on what I honestly believe to be the worst road in the islands, we were forced to make camp at a mere 10,000 feet. The next morning, we discovered to our displeasure that we had camped but a half mile below the cozy rest house at Hale Pohaku.

It took us four hours to reach ice covered Lake Waiau and only an hour and a half to get down. This was due not to the broad and clearly defined trail, but rather to the extremely rare atmosphere at that altitude--13,500 feet. Even walking along perfectly level ground was a laborious task.

That night found us recuperating at the Honokaa Club Hotel in preparation for catching the plane back to Honolulu the next day. The final reading of the speedometer showed that we had driven better than 3,500 miles in less than two weeks.

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MARCH BIRDWALK. On Sunday, March 10, a small group of members assembled at the Library of Hawaii for the Poamoho birdwalk. It had rained a short time earlier and some doubt was expressed as to the advisability of making the trip, as the mountain roads were impassable if too wet. A consensus of opinion of the eleven members present was to chance it.

As we drove along Kamehameha Highway the usual birds were seen. Mynah birds swaggered across the road or perched near-by. Grayish-brown Barred Doves flitted here and there. Occasional larger brown Chinese Doves, with the metallic neck patch, were seen. The ever present English sparrows and tiny black-chinned brown Rice Birds were seen in small flocks. Fiery black-throated, scarlet Cardinals whistled from kiawe trees. Brazilian Cardinals attracted attention, their red heads contrasting with their gray backs and white breasts. At Salt Lake, Night Herons stood motionless in the shallow water, while Golden Plover ran along the shore. Some were in their mottled transition plumage while others wore their courting plumage of black breast, golden-yellow and white mottled back and white streak running over to the forehead and along the sides of the neck to the chest.

At Wahiawa, we left the highway and followed the red dirt road through the pineapple fields to the mountains. Leaving our cars at the end of the road we proceeded on foot along the narrow mountain trail. In these mountain forests that rose a short distance above the trail and stretched out in a great green forested carpet below the trail, we had our best chance to study the native Hawaiian birds, as well as some of the other shyer species. Among the Koa and Ohia trees flitted White-eyes in small noisy flocks. Japanese Hill Robins whistled as they flitted through the trees or came down close to the trail to scold us, then flitting off again through the lower branches. Their red bills, olive-green backs and yellow breasts identified them. It was thought that a Japanese Tit was seen but it was not positively identified. Some of us got a few brief glimpses of the Chinese of spectacled thrush. Its loud song help to identify this long-tailed brown bird with a white patch about each eye. The friendly Elepaio were fairly common along the trail. As we filed along, an almost insect-like tseet call told us Amakihi were in the vicinity. We spotted a small flock in the ohia trees, leisurely searching for food. These yellowish birds with yellowish-green back, yellow under parts and curved, sickle bill, seemed quite friendly.

The most interesting birds of the trip were the Iiwi and Apapane. It was the first view of them for some of us. A few Iiwi were seen. We had a good glimpse of these brilliant scarlet red birds with black wings and tail, long reddish curved bill and reddish legs, feeding on the Ohia flowers. Their song sounded like the creaking of a rusty gate.

The Apapane were quite numerous among the Ohia trees, darting about from one scarlet flower to another. We paused to eat our lunch on a rocky shelf on the path and had a chance to watch these rosy-crimson birds with the black wings and tail, black legs and black, curved bill. In flight they showed a conspicuous white patch, the belly and under-tail coverts being white. This white patch distinguishes them from the Iiwi in flight. Their rather monotonous song resembles the song of the Grasshopper Sparrow of the States.

When we reached the pass where the trail turns down toward Kahana Bay we turned back. A threatening rain storm caused us to quicken our pace. Arriving at our cars, we wended our way back thru the pineapple fields, thru Wahiawa to Pearl Harbor where we separated and went our several ways, tired but happy over a most successful day.

oOo

--Gordon Pearsall

We note with pleasure another instance of the interest which the Navy has so consistently shown in protecting bird life - an order recently issued by Admiral Taffinder, reading as follows: "On outlying islands under the jurisdiction of Commander Hawaiian Sea Frontier it is forbidden for any person to hunt, trap, capture, wilfully disturb or wantonly kill any bird of any kind whatever, or take or destroy the eggs or nests of such birds, except by authority of the Commander."

MAY ACTIVITIES:

Bird Walk, May 12th, to Aiea Heights trail. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 8:30, or at the Aiea Postoffice at 9:00.

MEETING:

May 20th, at the Library of Hawaii, at 7:30. The constitution revision will be discussed and voted upon at this meeting, and other matters of business discussed. Please plan to be present.

Field Notes

Mrs. Helen Shiras Baldwin writes on April 9, "All this spring we have heard many 'Sky cats' at night, more than ever before." This is good news if it is the uau or dark-rumped petrel (Petrodroma Phaeopygia sandwichensis) as I think it is. This is the bird that was mentioned by Wilson and later by Henshaw as crying over Hilo on foggy nights. Of course it maybe the wedge-tailed shearwater (Puffinus pacificus cuneatus). Mrs. Baldwin mentions that the "cardinals, doves, mynahs and mejiros" have moved inland from the devastated area at Hilo. The mynahs and doves go back to feed and she fears they may be caught by the spraying of D.D.T. which is likely to be resorted to as a health measure. She fears the Chinese thrushes and hill robins were overwhelmed by the water.

Word has come of a blackfooted albatross which arrived at Kailua in an exhausted condition. This is the first instance of a black-footed albatross landing on Oahu that I know of. I hope to get more detail about it.--George C. Munro.

Word has also come from Mr. Hector Moir that the Laysan albatross has returned to Koloa, Kauai. Readers will remember the account of their arrival last year. (ELEPAIO, Vol. 5, No. 11, pg. 70). We hope for a more complete account later.

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