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For the Better Protection of Wildlife in Hawaii

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DANCE OF THE LAYSAN ALBATROSS

Sandie Moir

A high wind was blowing, and Hector suggested driving up to the Makahuena Lighthouse Point to look for Hawaiian stone implements. It is always advantageous to search in a gale, as the sand is blown about, and objects come to light. The low sand dunes near the point are the site of an ancient Hawaiian burial ground; we have found stone sinkers, and once a tiny bone fish-hook.

I was wandering along, eyes on the ground, when Hector called, above the sound of the wind, "Look - our friend is back!" and I knew immediately that he meant the Laysan Albatross (*Diomedea immutabilis*).

There he was, soaring on the wind current, rising and falling; skimming the earth, rocks, and bushes with his wing-tips; and rushing past us with the speed of the gale itself. We lost him for a minute, and then, all at once, we looked over the brow of a sand dune, and on the ground as big as life were two of the great birds, calm and poised.

We exclaimed in a breath, he has found his mate again! as we had feared, last year, that he had lost her. Hector found one in the Koloa town where the bird had fallen in a storm, and had been caught by some children, from whom Hector rescued the exhausted creature. The other we never saw again, so we hoped that she had gone back to Laysan. At that time, Hector brought the terrified, fighting bundle of feathers home to get me to help him let it go again at the lighthouse. He had him wrapped in a coat as he was so fierce, snapping his six-inch pale yellow bill, which sounded like the bones they clack in a rhumba band; attempting to scratch him with his duck-like feet, and strike with his great wings, with their seven-foot spread. We carried him from the car, still wrapped in the coat, then cautiously loosened him, and he sat quietly on the ground.

We noticed that the feathers on his neck and breast were like ermine, tiny and soft and white. His eyes were a beautiful dark brown, more like the eyes of a fox-terrier than a bird - they had not the reptilian look of so many birds.

I dashed off and found our friends the Charles Harkers, who are members of the Society. They came with a colored camera, and for over half an hour, we four, sat in an admiring circle around our friend, who was panting from his ordeal, though never showing fear of us. Suddenly he stood up, - quickly Charles took a snap, - then he stretched to his full height, and finally he stumped off, ran into the wind and rose, wearily, like a loaded B-24 bomber, and was gone.

We were enchanted this time to again see a pair, and naturally hope it is the same romantic pair that visited us last year. It was windy then too, and about the same time of the year.¹

We walked towards the birds and they flew off, not in haste or fear, but because they seemed to enjoy flying. They landed again, on a small, grassy slope near some Naupaka plants. Other folks had seen them, so we all strolled slowly towards them till we were within thirty feet.

All at once, the birds started to clash their beaks together, and to bow, and sway, shifting from one foot to the other, and ruffle their feathers. The larger one fluffed his wing feathers and nipped at the hollow under the wing joint, clacked his beak with his mate, raised his neck and head and beak straight up into the air and neighed ecstatically, in the clearest, most piercing sound that I have ever heard. They rubbed bills again, made a sort of honking, mumbling chant; then the other bird ruffled her feathers, nipped under her wing, raised her head to high heaven and neighed. There must be a musk sac under the wings that they use as a perfume or lure. The two of them fluffed their wings, always swaying, and then both great birds raised their heads together and gave forth their pean of joy. It was thrilling.

This dance lasted for nearly fifteen minutes. It had all the grace and continuity of a ballet.

Quickly as it had started, it was all over. The birds sank down upon the grass for a few minutes. We waited to see what would happen next. The larger bird rose, stretched his wings, ran into the wind and soared off. He returned in a few minutes, while she still sat and mumbled a bit. He rubbed bills with her, then flew away, and she rose, stretched and went off to join him. They flew back over us, their great wings brushing the shrubs, and we all ducked our heads, paying homage, in a way, for the privilege of being allowed to witness one of nature's most charming courtships.

As witnessed by Hector and Sandie Moir, Makahuena Point, Koloa, Kauai, T. H., March 31, 1946.

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¹ See ELEPAIO, Volume 5, No. 11, p.70.

Field Note

At Kuupu Pond, Sunday afternoon, April 28th, two frigate birds were observed, swooping very low over the pond, attracted, no doubt by the leaping mullet. One came close enough to be identified as a female. A flock of perhaps fifty shorebirds, mostly turnstone, with a few scattered plover, was feeding along the edge of the pond. Six night herons were also observed in the shallow water, and the call of a tattler sounded musically in the distance.

FACTS ABOUT BIRDS
By George C. Munro
Continued from last issue

According to information given me from Palmyra and Christmas Islands, the Ellis Island laborers there eat the Hawaiian tern (Anous minutus meanogenys). Their system of cooking the bird on Christmas Island as described to me by Major L. W. Bryan who was in Charge of the armed forces there in the latter part of the war. The midrib of the leaflet of the cocoanut tree is run right through the bird from end to end. The bird is held over the fire till the feathers are burnt off and the flesh cooked. Then only the breast meat is eaten. I did not hear of any other terns being used for food.

Recently I saw it stated that the white tern or love bird (Cygnis alba rothschildi) has the same harsh voice as the other terns. There is a vast difference between the voices of the different species of terns. On an island like Midway where the harsh voice of the sooty tern resounds constantly it might easily be mistaken for the white tern which is spread over the whole island. The white tern has a voice in keeping with its delicate appearance. It has two low gentle sounds; one a low croak and the other a gentle uh uh.

In 1942 a difference of opinion arose between another and myself as to whether sea birds return to the island on which they were raised to breed. I have little evidence so far in connection with our sea birds to substantiate either view. It would seem by our observations during banding that the wedge-tailed shearwater and red-footed booby do so return and that the brown booby goes to other islands. Of course to colonize an island it would be necessary for birds to go to an island other than that on which they were raised, or for the old birds to move on. On the islands off Oahu, during the five years we banded there the wedge-tailed shearwaters seldom changed. We did not band young birds so have no statistics on their movements. In 1937 Mr. Fred Hadden banded 90 young Laysan albatrosses and for four years after none had returned (banded albatrosses are easy to detect). However, during 1944 and 1945 I have records of two with bands that were probably put on by him at that time. One was 36-814676, recaptured on Sand Island of Midway on November 26, 1944, found in list furnished by Boatswain Jesse Baxter. The other was 36-814971, taken by Commodore Gail Morgan on Sand Island. It mated and laid an egg. The egg spoiled about January 30, 1945. I am now taking up an intensive study of a small colony of wedge-tailed shearwaters on Kapapa Island in Kaneohe Bay which will be carried on from year to year and should furnish interesting information which will be published in the Elepaio. It may help to clear up some debatable points. There is a wonderful field for such a study on Mokumanu but that is work for younger men.

On November 8, 1933 I saw on the coast at Kahaluu a glaucous or Point Barrow gull (Larus hyperboreus). On November 11, 1945 I was told of one that was evidently of this species having been seen on Sand Island or Ahu o Kaka in Kaneohe Bay. I am sure this bird would become a regular migrant if it could find sustenance here. I know of two that were picked up on the sand beach that were so thin and weak they could not rise.

Several of my friends report having seen tropic birds at Mokulii and Mokumanu. Two different bird observers told me they saw red-tailed tropic birds (*Phaethon rubricauda rothschildi*) at Mokumanu. So far I have not seen either species at either of the two islands. The beautiful group of the white-tailed species mounted by Mr. W. Alanson Bryan in the Bishop Museum was taken from Mokulii and I am glad to find that it still frequents the island where it is safe from mongooses and cats. It is also hoped that both it and the red-tailed species nest on Mokumanu and we will watch for authentic information on this.

APRIL BIRD WALK:

On April 14th, there was a gathering of the Clans at the Public Library, and after waiting a while for any possible stragglers, the caravan got under way for the old Palehua Trail. The new road goes to the old Von Holt place, and is a very excellent road. The army has their Radio-telephone and Radio-telegraph transmitter and receiving station at the end of the road, which would account for the excellence of the road. While the heavy vehicles of the Army have severely damaged the lowland highways, perhaps the building of new roads into the mountains making accessible hither-to hard to reach places has compensated. Considerable tree covered country was passed, and many birds were noted flitting about, but of course our progress was too swift to take any notes.

The cars were parked just below the gate at the radio building and we proceeded on foot up the Ridge trail to Manawahua Ridge. It seemed for a while as if the wood was full of invisible birds as there were calls and songs on all sides, but nothing to be seen. A little later, several places were found, about half way along the ridge toward the radar station, which were excellent for stopping for observation.

There was a strange bird call which was not definitely identified and the bird giving it was not seen, but the experts, but a process of elimination, decided that it could be none other than the Japanese bush warbler.

Of course the Elepaio are always with us, as are the White-eyes. A nest was spotted in a very slim tree, and after some time a pair of linnets were seen to go to it. There were many Amakihi and a Creeper was definitely identified by the straight beak. The Hill Robin seemed to be around in quite large numbers, and a few were seen.

There was only one untoward incident. As we were approaching the bottom of the hill road, on a nice wide level place, one of the tires which had seen service during the war on Miss Hatch's car was demobilized with a loud "bang".

The weatherman was with us too, because there were practically no clouds. For a week previous and nearly ever since, the ridge has been shrouded in cloud. - E. B. Hamilton

Paul H. Baldwin, formerly at the Hawaii National Park, first as Naturalist, lately as Acting Superintendent, is now Curator of Collections at the Bishop Museum. We welcome the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin in Honolulu. Mr. Baldwin already has his shoulder to the wheel. Note the June meeting!

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Another member, Ralph Andrew, sending us, alas, his forwarding address in Ithaca, makes the following comments:

"My ornithology here at Haleiwa has been greatly limited. Outside of the shore birds and the birds of the Kiawe thickets, there has been little to observe. However, I have had the novel experience of observing some of our sea birds from the air. It is quite an experience to see a frigate bird soaring below you or to watch the boobies and tropic birds flitting like tiny white moths over the surface of the ocean... My best wishes to you."

Aloha, Mr. Andrew!

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In an article entitled "The war and Pacific birds", in the NATURE MAGAZINE, for March, 1946, pp. 125-127, Mr. George C. Munro discusses the effect of the war upon birds of the Pacific islands, the efforts the Navy has made to protect bird life, and the necessity for study of the situation upon these islands. The article is illustrated with excellent picture of sea birds.

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JUNE ACTIVITIES:

Meeting: June 10th, at 7:30 P. M. in the auditorium of the Library of Hawaii, Paul H. Baldwin will talk on the birds of the Hawaiian chain.

Overnight trip to Rabbit Island, June 15th. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 3:00 P. M. Bring blankets, water, and food for supper and breakfast. A few flashlights in the party will be helpful. Boat fare is \$2.00 a person. We expect to be back in town by noon, at the latest, on Sunday. Any one needing further information, or who wishes to arrange another meeting place, call 76085 after 5:00 P. M. *

HONOLULU AUDUBON SOCIETY

President, Mr. Gordon Pearsall, Makiki Hotel, 1661 Piikoi St., Vice-Presidents, Miss Grenville Hatch, 1548 Wilhelmina Rise, Mr. Francis Evans, 132 A. Royal Circle; Sec-Treas., Mrs. Blanche Anderson Pedley, 3770 Sierra Drive, Honolulu 17; Advisors, Mr. George C. Munro, Lt. Col. E. H. Bryan Jr.; Editor, THE ELEPAIO, Miss Charlotta Hoskins, 3212 Loulu St., Honolulu 54, Hawaii.

Dues, \$1.00 a year

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Participation limited to members and not more than 1 guest each, who have registered with Miss Hatch by phone or mail not later than noon June 11.