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## OAHU'S OFFSHORE ISLETS AS BIRD REFUGES

By Harvey I. Fisher

Much has been written of the small islands lying off the eastern coast of Oahu, T. H. Chief among these are Popoia, Moku Manu, Mokolii, Mokuauia, Mokolea, Kapapa, Kaohikaipu, Mokulua, and Manana Islets. No islands suitable for refuges are to be found along the other coasts of Oahu. Before the war there was a desire on the part of some persons to make these islands semi-sanctuaries for birds, and I use the term "semi-sanctuary" advisedly. Others wanted to populate these rocks with foreign, introduced species.

The war brought an abrupt end to all such discussion; the islands were brought under military control, and all persons were prohibited from landing on them. Some of the islets were admittedly used for coast artillery practice, others were used in similar fashion but such use was denied by the military. Perhaps the practice bombing and strafing were carried on unofficially. Planes buzzed the islands day and night, undoubtedly throwing the seabirds into an uproar each time.

The past and the future effect of the armed forces is indicated in a notice in the Honolulu Star-Bulletin for September 8, 1945. On page 5 is the article from which the following excerpts are taken.

"HEADQUARTERS, AAF, MIDDLE PACIFIC, HICKAM FIELD, Sept. 8.-- Maj. Gen. James E. Parker, commanding army air forces, Middle Pacific, warns all military personnel and civilians that, despite the end of the war, the group of small islands between Kahuku and Laie, Oahu, are still in use as bombing and gunnery targets.

"The area is subject to bombing and gunnery action at all times and without notice...."

Nor has the military been the sole factor operating to the detriment of the birds. Despite the order denying anyone the use of these islands in any way, it is possible to see almost any day from my home in Kailua persons moving about on Popoia. These persons get to the island in boats, on surfboards and by swimming, and they use it as a base for swimming parties, picnics and fishing. The public beach opposite Popoia attracts many people; the island is attractive and nearby and thus draws these persons to it. Other islands off this coast are more distant and rugged and cannot be so easily reached by the general public. Consequently it is hoped the birds have fared better on them.

What has been the change on some of these islands? I wish to discuss, for the most part, the islet of Popoia. In June, 1945, I noticed, with the aid of binoculars, persons throwing fluttering,



dark objects into the air. These objects fell into the water and were seen no more. My curiosity aroused at this continued activity on the part of two or three persons I swam out to the island. On the small beach and wedged in the rocks on the lee side of the island I found three freshly dead Bulwer's Petrels--evidently washed in by wave action but with no marks on them. The men threw no more objects into the water after my arrival but merely stood watching me. The logical supposition is that the "objects" were petrels pulled from their burrows or crevices and thrown into the air. Being unable or disinclined to fly they plummeted into the water and drowned. Although no count was kept of the petrels thrown out before I investigated, there must have been 50 or 75 birds thus destroyed.

On this date I saw no live Bulwer's Petrels, although no particular search was made. More than 50 pairs of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, many on eggs, were noted in nooks and crannies in the rock. Most of the shearwaters were in rocky crevices leading off from areas which had sunk some 3 to 5 feet below the surrounding level of rock. There are five of these sunken areas on the island, the largest being some 30 feet in diameter. The floor of each is, or was, lush with a growth of a creeping vine.

In July, 1945, there were perhaps 100 pairs of shearwaters on eggs, but no young were present. No other birds were observed, although two partly skeletonized carcasses of Bulwer's Petrels were found.

On September 2, 1945, Popoia was again visited. The only living birds were 4 adult and 11 young Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, and one adult Barred Dove. What happened to the other eggs (or subsequent young) observed in July? One sunken area in which more than a dozen eggs had been found previously was on this visit a mess of refuse left by picnickers. Newspapers, bottles and tin cans were everywhere. The vegetation was trampled flat. No birds, dead or alive, or eggs were found here. In other places dead birds pierced by sticks were observed back in their burrows. Large bottles and tin cans were mixed with dead birds in other crevices. Some nesting burrows were dug out, others caved in and others plugged with sticks.

The number of birds found on September 2 is of course not the total number on Popoia, but the figure is much smaller than earlier in the summer, and is decidedly smaller than before the war when Munro (1938) estimated a population of 2,000 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters on the islet. At present it seems improbable that more than 200 pairs nest there, and nesting is perhaps less than 25 per cent successful.

It is important to remember that this decline in numbers occurred during a period in which no one was allowed on the island (theoretically). The responsibility is to be laid solely at the feet of those who used the island as a fishing, swimming and picnicking area. Popoia shows no sign of bombing, strafing or artillery fire.

The importance of these offshore islands is emphasized by the past distribution of birds. Years ago before man became so numerous and utilized so much space here and introduced the rat, the mongoose



and other harmful species, many seabirds nested on the coast and in the mountains of Oahu. Those species for example, Pterodroma phaeopygia sandwichensis and Puffinus newelli that nested exclusively on the large islands where man lived, and could not or would not move, have disappeared. Other species have maintained themselves on the offshore rocks after having been driven from the larger islands. Many of these offshore islets have only been populated with birds within the last 50 years, and it is reasonable to expect that with proper protection other species might also use these areas. Consequently, because these offshore islands are, so to speak, the last possible foothold of many species within our main island archipelago let us not drive them away entirely by using the islands for our own purposes.

What can be done with an islet such as Popoia? It seems unlikely that those proponents of Popoia as a semi-sanctuary with the public invited will still adhere to this idea. A certain period at least of absolute protection from all human agencies seems to be the only solution, and it is questionable if even that will restore the birds.

Perhaps it would be well to note certain features of an investigation on similar offshore rocks in California. Grinnell and Linsdale (Vertebrate Animals of Point Lobos Reserve, 1934-35. Carnegie Institute, Washington, Publ. 481, 1936) made a study of the Point Lobos peninsula in Monterey County, California. This reserve also includes cliffs and offshore rocks used by colonies of birds. Let us note some of their findings.

They have the following to say regarding people using the reserve. "Several categories of persons with widely varied purposes came to the area. Fishermen perhaps make up the largest group and most of these appeared to come solely on account of the accessibility of the ocean here; and they seemed to pay little attention to anything on the land. Picnickers, another large group, appeared to be even less aware of the details of their surroundings. Since they usually came in parties--as many as fifty were seen together--they were likely to be so preoccupied with their own activities, chiefly social in kind, as to miss almost entirely any contact with their surroundings unless this involved discomfort.

"Other visitors came for any one of many reasons, some to get something of salable value, some to add a new locality to their travel experience, some to rest, and some to see, hear, smell, taste, feel, and reflect upon, the realities of nature. Of all types of visitors, the one least likely to justify his privilege of coming to the Reserve is the member of a crowd, and the one most worthy is the one who comes alone. This latter type is the one which should be encouraged and helped in as many ways as possible, even to the extent of restricting the pleasures of the crowds."

Speaking of the offshore rocks they write, "We think it desirable that no person, not even any officer on the Reserve, be permitted to land on the island where the pelicans nest or roost." Again, noting other bird colonies, "Additionally, care should be taken to



keep main trails and other loci of human activities back from the cliff edges overlooking the sites of nesting colonies, where these are close to the shore."

They mention again and again the need for patrol work and recommend that fires, even in fireplaces, be prohibited. They question the advisability of permitting fishing in the area. Above all, it is urged that no human be allowed to "improve" the park.

It is significant that these and other recommendation were put into effect, and that the vertebrate animals are surviving in goodly numbers.

In the light of this successful preserve and the observed depredations on Popoia it is recommended: 1) that the offshore islets of Oahu be closed to the public immediately; 2) that this restriction be widely publicized, signs posted and then enforced by adequate patrol service with arrests and convictions if necessary; 3) that periodic surveys by competent individuals be made; and 4) that no person, however well-meaning, be allowed to change the fauna, flora or surface of the islets in any way.

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September 5, 1945

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Quotations from Letter written by Dr. R. C. L. Perkins July 1, 1945 commenting on "Contributions to the Ornithology of the Hawaiian Islands" by E. H. Bryan Jnr. and J. C. Greenway Jnr.

Perkins writes: "I agree generally with the first part of the bird paper written apparently entirely by Bryan alone. I am interested to see that the descent of the Drepanididae from Fringillidae was suggested in 1926 by Siskin. Of course I never saw this paper, but when I wrote the 'Ibis' paper on the Drepanids and the 'Fauna' paper the possibility of a Tanagrine or Fringilline origin of these birds occupied my mind, but I considered Gadow's opinion of their Cerebid origin was safer to adopt, since he had such a profound and wide knowledge of bird morphology, which I lacked. Of course Sclater was the first to connect the thick-billed finch-like species with the honeysucking lot, but I had not seen his paper when I came to the same conclusion and did not know this till later.

"I cannot at all agree that the two *Phaeornis* of Kauai represent two ancestral stocks. The following part of the paper I presume was largely due to Greenway, since in the first part Bryan accepts the number of species much as all previous writers had held. The sinking of all the species of *Hemignathus* and *Heterorhynchus* (as used in *Fauna Hawaiiensis*) and of *Loxops*, *Paroreomyza*, *Moho* (*Acrolocercus*) into one species with a number of Subspecies is to me quite unnecessary and would be contrary to the opinion of any of the ornithologists I have known including Stejneger



and Henshaw. Personally I do not believe the species of Paroreomyza are really all congeneric and I was inclined myself to make a subgenus of the Kauai Oo. Hemignathus and Heterorhynchus, as used in F. H., are in my opinion quite distinct as genera, apart from the beak character. I note that Hemignathus ellisianus is recorded as 'perhaps confined to the Waianae mountains.' It is curious if it should be there, as the forest is so much less than in the Koolau range, and I was over practically the whole of that range on both lee and windward side and saw nothing like it. The known specimens were all got in Nuuanu Valley towards the Pali and therefore at no great distance from where I saw that pair. It must if it occurs still be very rare, as neither I nor Wilson nor Palmer and Worstenholme....ever got a specimen, though we were all so well acquainted with the Hemignathus on other islands. I dissent entirely from a good deal of the final part of the paper written by Greenway (alone presumably). So far as I remember I think the skin of the Molokai mamo I examined had distinctly blunt or truncated tips to a number of the primaries, but of Ciridops I saw only mounted specimens, which could not be pulled about. Anyhow those Melanodrepanine birds have quite different voices from those of the green section, and further anyone who used only .22 shot cartridges as I did in my 20 bore gun from 1885 would have found that all the green birds from the ou down to the smaller things like Loxops, Chlorodrepanis and Paroreomyza could be killed with certainty at a considerably greater distance than could Palmeria, Vestiaria, Himatione and the Molokai mamo. No doubt I saw other differences, which at the moment I cannot recall. The only reason why I did not send back a spirit specimen of Chloridops for Gadow was because in 1896 Henry Greenwell had two whole birds in spirit, having shot these for Scott Wilson and I presumed that he would turn these over to Gadow, but I heard afterwards that Wilson had these made into skins without doing so! I did not myself see any special difference between the tongue of this and the allied genera. It is unfortunate that the rather abnormal Paroreomyza maculata was given in my paper as type of this genus.. This addition to the table of Genera I made in the 'Ibis' paper was not made by me, but by those who handled my M. S. when it was sent to England - either to Dr. Sharp or Prof. Newton. If I had named a type it would have been the Lanai species Montana, but I did not name a type. No proofs were sent out to me for correction.

"It is rather amusing that, in this M.S., concerning the Apapane (Himatione) I made a quotation from Tennyson's poem, 'Lancelot and Elaine,'. When I was in one camp under a single flowering Ohia the only bird that frequented this tree was the Apapane - a pair I think - and I heard its song day after day. So when writing my Ibis paper I thought of this and it recalled to my memory the poet's words:

'a little innocent bird,  
That has but one plain passage of few notes,  
Will sing that simple passage o'er and o'er  
For all an April morning, till the ear  
Wearies to hear it".

"In the 'Ibis' this was altered to: 'The song of the Apapane is short, monotonous and oft repeated, but not displeasing'! In Fauna



Hawaiiensis, (I) page 407-I did not try to repeat the verse, but wrote: 'It is a most untiring songster, and its song though short is pleasing, but from constant repetition becomes wearisome'. No doubt the same can be said of many English birds!" I certainly found it so with the New Zealand tui, a beautiful singer. A tui had a nest in a tree at a place where a survey party to which I was attached camped for a few days. The male sang from early morning into the night, but kept to one song. We moved several miles to another camp. Here was another tui with a different song which he in turn made tiresome to us."

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September Bird Walk: The first month of Peace and lifted gasoline rationing found the Audubon Society ready to welcome the new era with a trip far afield, to one of pre-war favorite trails - Poamoho. The turnout, too, was fitting of the occasion, as a count of heads at both the beginning and the end of the walk showed twenty in our enthusiastic group.

Transportation was left at the edge of the Territorial Forest Reservation some six miles mauka of Wahiawa. A rough mountain road, and then the old trail, were followed into the Koolau Range. A light rain at the start reminded us that we were nature's children, but the elements were kind and the weather continued excellent.

Though our group was large for close bird observation, a number of our Small Friends were seen, and their songs were always with us.

There were, of course, our old stand-bys, the Elepaio and the White Eye. Good views were had of the showy Apapane, of the Amakihi, and many Hill Robins were seen and heard along the trail. Several times the brilliantly colored but scarce and illusive Iiwi was heard, but we were not so fortunate to see it. A bird which appeared to be a Japanese Tit was seen, but it was not positively identified.

Some other highlights of the trip were wild bananas in a mountain-side grove, the finding of a white orchid, and the consternation that was caused for a minute when someone suggested at the end of the walk that there were originally twenty-one in the group and not twenty. A quick, but thorough check, proved that all were present.

Everyone - the oldtimers, those who have been making most of the recent trips, and the newcomers - was pleased with the good turnout for that Poamoho Walk. All were in agreement that it was a successful day, and are looking forward to getting out on the trail again next month.

Robert E. Finn, Lieutenant, U.S.N.R.



A letter received several months ago by Lieut. Fred Packard, from Albert M. Day, Acting Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, states once more that the Migratory Bird Treaty Act does apply to Hawaii, and explains why the question ever was raised. The question has been answered in the affirmative before, in other communications from the Fish and Wildlife Service, and by the Territorial Board of Agriculture and Forestry, who not only say that the Act is applicable, but enforce its provisions by means of their own regulations. The letter follows, in part:

"In 1922 when as the Bureau of Biological Survey we were in the Department of Agriculture, the then Solicitor for that Department was requested to inform us whether the Act was applicable to Puerto Rico and Hawaii and we received an affirmative reply. For your information we quote from his opinion as follows:

"The Migratory Bird Treaty Act in terms refers, in several of its sections, to Territories as well as to States. Since there were no territories within the Continental United States at the time of the passage of the Act, Congress must have intended to include Territories without Continental United States. Having used the work in the plural number, it could not have intended to confine the application of the Act to Alaska, and Hawaii and Puerto Rico were the only territories in existence when the Act was passed.

"Considering the local applicability of the Act to Hawaii and Puerto Rico from the standpoint of the purpose to be attained, I think that it protects all birds named in the Convention and found in those territories which, as a species, may migrate between Hawaii and Canada or Puerto Rico and Canada, although individuals of the species may never leave Hawaii or Puerto Rico, or may migrate to countries other than Canada."

#### NOVEMBER ACTIVITIES.

Bird Walk. To Kaupu Pond, on November 11th. Meet at Woodland (bus terminal toward Koko Head) at 10:30. Take Kuliouou bus on Kalakaua Ave., or transfer to it from the end of the Kaimuki-Kealaolu bus. This is a short, easy trip, and we should be able to study shore birds.

Meeting: At the auditorium of the Library of Hawaii, November 19th, at 7:30 P.M. Plans for the Christmas census will be formulated. Mr. Gordon Pearsall will talk on duck banding.

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