

T H E E L E P A I O

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LAYSAN ISLAND IN 1891.

by George C. Munro

In June of 1891 I spent ten days on the Island of Laysan, five days of July on Lisiansky and six on the two islands of the Midway atoll. The expedition passed close to Nihoa, Necker and Gardner Islands without landing and spent a couple of days among the islets of the French Frigate Shoals. This chain of islands runs northwest from Honolulu to Ocean or Kure Island, a distance of approximately 1400 nautical miles, and was visited by an expedition from the Bishop Museum in 1923. An interesting article describing the trip written by Dr. Alexander Wetmore and illustrated by beautiful photographs of the birds by Mr. Donald R. Dickey appeared in the National Geographic Magazine. My remarks apply to a period thirty-two years before his visit.

I was connected with an expedition, headed by Mr. H. C. Palmer, collecting bird specimens for the Honorable Walter Rothschild whose collections at Tring, England¹ are world famous. We were passengers on the forty ton schooner "Kaalokai" (Captain F. D. Walker) which was on a shark fishing expedition along the leeward island as far as Midway. The purpose was to collect on every island of the chain but the rocky islets mentioned had a forbidding appearance with precipitous shores and high surf running and the Captain refused to make any attempt to land. We had to be satisfied with a look at the islands, with their swarms of circling seabirds, from a distance of several miles. We missed the two new land birds of Nihoa found by the Bishop Museum expedition in 1923 and the interesting archeological finds on Nihoa and Necker Islands. It was known to a few that an undescribed bird existed on Nihoa but no opportunity offered to collect specimens of it in the intervening thirty-two years.

Herr von Kittlitz wrote of Laysan Island ninety-five years ago, mentioning its large colonies of birds breeding and paired in the month of March when he visited the island. The little white tern (Love Bird), least common of the seabird inhabitants, carried his name, Gygis alba kittlitzii, since changed to Gygis alba rothschildi.

Fourteen days after leaving Honolulu we landed at Laysan and spent a wonderful evening with Captain Freeth, manager of the guano works then in operation on the island. He told us of the arrival of the Laysan albatross (Diomedea immutabilis) at nesting time when the island surface was white with these beautiful birds. He told us of their amusing dance, of the large number of young killed in storms (largely adding to the rich guano deposits) and of their habit of leaving their young when full grown to live on their own fat and exercise their wings until sufficiently reduced in condition

¹ The Rothschild bird collection has since become the property of the American Museum of Natural History.

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and hardened to take to the open sea. He described the predatory habits of the frigate birds, such as robbing other birds of their catch and picking up any unprotected chicks on the sand without alighting, and last season's birds raiding the nests of their own kind and carrying off the young when the old birds were disturbed by anyone walking through the rookery. He told how the curlew and finch sucked the albatross eggs and every bird had to stay by its egg or young, male and female in turn, to protect the chick until well grown. Much other information he gave us and we found him an accurate observer. He told us many a good yarn in the evenings following and Captain Walker has related some of these in "The Cruise of the Kaalokai" a readable pamphlet written by him describing the voyage. After the weary time in the cramped and uncomfortable quarters of the schooner, the freedom of Laysan with the hospitality and humor of Captain Freeth was much enjoyed.

Written, December, 1929.

To be continued.

Revised, October, 1945

First printed in Asia Magazine.

BACK TO SCHOOL by J. d'Arcy Northwood

Any bird student in America has heard of Dr. Arthur A. Allen, Professor of Ornithology at Cornell University, and has probably read his "Book of Bird Life" and enjoyed his articles and pictures in the National Geographic Magazine. When the decision was made to go back to school after thirty years absence it was his influence as much as anything else that prompted the choice of Cornell University, at Ithaca in central New York State.

Registration day was an ordeal. It took place in Barton Hall, a huge drill hall of $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres. Even that was not big enough for the crowd, many of whom had to stand in line outside in the wind and rain for over an hour before even getting under shelter. Then it was another hour before we reached a group of girls who rapidly tore our bunches of tickets to pieces and passed us into the hall. There we wandered about among a maze of tables, trying to find some friendly sign. At last I saw ZOOLOGY and was steered to Kr. Allen. He gave me the soundest advice about courses and I was soon signed up for two of his, Advanced Ornithology and Wildlife Conservation; two in Zoology, Natural History of Vertebrates and Mammalogy; and two given by Dr. E. Laurence Palmer, Professor of Rural Education, Nature Literature and the Nature Movement; as well as a seminar in ornithology.

Nothing has pleased me more at Cornell than to find that great importance is attached to field trips and surely no university is better situated for them. Cornell has many handsome buildings, situated high on a divide between two streams, which run in deep wooded gorges of astonishing beauty. These and the surrounding country have been carefully preserved in a natural condition and offer outdoor laboratories of the greatest value.

In my mind, ornithology was associated with measuring tarsi and counting primaries. Those are important but do not attract me so much as the study and appreciation of the living bird. On the first afternoon a small group of us went to Stewart Park at the south end of Cayuga Lake, where there is a sanctuary dedicated to Louis Agassiz

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Fuertes. There dozens of mallards were gathered, expectant of a hand-out. They were beautiful in their fresh plumage and we noted slight variations in their markings. Further out in the lake was a flock of scaup, with a solitary redhead tagging along. In the quiet water of the basin were more mallards and a few black ducks up-ending in the shallow water. Some Canada geese were splashing about and rolling over onto their backs, actually enjoying that cold water. A few immature coots were paddling along the edge of the reeds, we were disappointed in not seeing a flock of thirteen whistling swans which had been seen earlier in the day. Walking through some bushes Dr. Allen pointed out some old nests and showed us how they could be identified, even though at a glance they were similar. Thus the goldfinch's nest is felted, wider than it is high and contains thistledown. The yellow warbler's is also felted but is higher than it is wide and has no thistledown.

Dr. A. H. Wright, Professor of Zoology, who gives the course in the Natural History of Vertebrates, took us out in Cascadilla Glen, a beautiful wooded gorge bounding the campus. There we found several species of salamanders under logs and stones and were given a breezy discourse on their structure and habits, with remarks on conservation, ecology and even politics thrown in.

Mammalogy is given by Dr. Hamilton, Associate Professor of Zoology. He took us out to a meadow ten minutes walk away and we were each given ten traps, the ordinary spring mousetraps. These were set and in a few minutes snaps were heard as the traps were sprung. Field mice and shrews were caught and the class gathered around and listened to a talk on their life history. This year is known as a mouse year, those animals have reached a peak of astonishing abundance. In those years the number of mice may be as high as 25,000 to an acre or more than one mouse to every two square feet of meadow. That was easy to believe when one saw the network of tunnels under the grass and it means a lot of grass eaten by the mice and lost to the farmer.

Nature Literature and The Nature Movement would not seem to offer much opportunity for field work, beyond exploring library shelves, but Dr. Palmer took us on a walk through the woods and fields at Ringwood. I have gone on a good many nature walks and even led a few myself but never have I been with a leader who had such interesting and varied knowledge of all branches of natural history. Only one thing was lacking on that cold November afternoon, there were no birds. Once we thought we heard kinglets and we listened in silence for confirmation, but heard no more. Then a glorious baying came from the sky. Looking up through the branches we saw the thin wavering line of the geese flying south.

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Mr. Northwood's article will be welcomed by his many friends who have been asking for news of his present activities. Our aloha and best wishes for the year to continue in such interesting fashion!

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BIRD STUDY ABOARD A TRANSPORT TO THE WESTERN PACIFIC
by Howard L. Cogswell.

Continued from the January issue

May 1.- To the international date line at 13° 30' N. Lat. (according to my "Golden Dragon" certificate) at about dusk. Consequently no observations were made on May 2, an exceedingly short day for us.

Wedge-tailed Shearwater. One at 0600, one at 0720. The only birds

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seen all day.

May 3. - Estimated 500 miles at dawn to 300 miles at dusk, ENE of Bikar in Marshall Islands.

Shearwater (sp?). One at 1745, the only bird seen all day with intermittent observation.

May 4 - Near Bikar in late P. M. Occasional observation in forenoon; none in early afternoon; steady after 1530.

Shearwater or large Storm-petrel (sp?). Six seen, all after 1715; all dark in color; the size of a Wedge-tailed Shearwater.

Red-footed Booby. Twenty-four, all after 1600. The first flock was composed of 16 birds madly diving into a swirling school of fish while a Frigate-bird hovered overhead and twice chased a booby for a short distance. I could not determine whether the booby gave up any of its catch. All homeward bound boobies seen in late P.M. were headed northward, thus indicating that their breeding colony was north of our course.

Frigate-bird. One with boobies at 1615 as described above.

Sooty(?) Tern. Three -- also with the boobies -- too far to identify exactly but were brown above and white below (possibly Brown-winged Terns).

White(?) Tern. One glimpsed briefly as it disappeared beyond the bow.

May 5. - To near Bikini, Marshalls Group, in P. M. No sight of land, however, and I judge the ship's course mainly from elapsed time of voyage and the bird life.

Tropic-bird (sp?) One at a distance -- 0915.

Shearwater or petrel (sp?) Two or more seen toward dusk; all dark like the ones on May 4.

May 6. - Nearing Eniwetok at dawn. At anchor within the atoll at 0800.

Shearwater or Petrel (sp?) -- Several) Seen over open ocean out-

White tern (Gygis alba) -- One) side the atoll.

May 7. - Out of Eniwetok at 1500. East, then, south and west of the atoll.

White tern. Seven counted. One was attempting to alight on the branches of the scraggly trees of a small islet, the others were seen just offshore with the exception of one about 20 miles south of the atoll. In spite of a rough sea and a quite brisk wind they flew vigorously into it, veering first up about 20 feet and then down skimming the waves to make headway. One came close enough to the ship so that I was able to see the black eye and area around it and the black bill.

May 8. - West from Eniwetok to approximately 350 miles distant at dusk.

A large to medium sized bird, dark in general coloration, seen settling on the water in distance at 0900 was the only bird seen all day. Possible shearwater.

May 9. - West of Eniwetok, 450 to 600 miles. Nearest land (at noon) about 230 miles southwest: Hall Islands near Truk in the Carolines.

Shearwater (sp?). Three large dark ones came close by the port at the beginning of a rain squall about noon, but were gone before I got the glasses on them.

To be continued.

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CHRISTMAS COUNT, 1945
by Rus Peterson

In the first light of a misty dawn on the morning of December 23, thirteen observers gathered to begin the day's activities. It was planned to divide the main group into three separate parties: one of which should cover the residential districts; another check the mountain species found near Tantalus; and the last should take the forest dwellers and pond and shore birds. It was a well-rounded coverage, planned so as not to miss a characteristic habitat nor leave a species uncounted. The weather was partly overcast and there was a dampness in the air, but it did little to dampen the spirits of those starting out.

Those who volunteered to take the residential count, Mr. and Mrs. Evans and Miss Peppin, covered mainly the Alewa Heights and Kapalama Heights areas, but also other sections on the way. The areas covered were chosen because they are typical habitats of those species classed as being "residential", but too, they are unique in sheltering the mocking bird, and we can thank Mr. Evans and his party for adding two of that species to our total list. The "residential party" covered ten miles by motor, two miles on foot, and spent four and one half hours in the field. Seven species were tabulated in all.

The "Tantalus group" took the complete circuit around the trail and over the top of Tantalus, and was composed of Miss Charlotta Hoskins, Miss Friscilla Griffey, Miss Evelyn Johnson, and Manning Richards. Three hours were spent in the field; seven miles were covered on foot, and eighteen by motor. A total of fourteen species was amassed by this hard-working group; those of particular interest being the Chinese thrush, amakihi, apapane, ricebird, and especially the Japanese tit, which was the only one of its kind recorded during the entire census, and besides being a rich "find" was a source of profound delight to those observing it.

I must here include a note regarding the three parties. Of course no one party was more important than the other. It is a pity that the preceding reports could not be given in the detail which they merit; the writer counts as unfortunate that he was able to accompany only one of these groups...any one of which would have offered a pleasant experience and one of immense interest.

After some difficulty in starting, and having lingered to view some ricebirds, "party # 3", the "forest-shore" group, composed of Mr. Ralph Andrews, Miss Grenville Hatch, Mrs. Bernice Kuhns, Mr. Gordon Pearsall, Sgt. Rus Peterson and Lt. Robert J. Watson, finally got under way. Our car was parked at the foot of the Aiea Heights trail, and under the competent guidance of Miss Hatch, we began the ascent.

As we passed along the lower reaches, the husky song of a linnet was heard, and further up the trail a flood of cascading calls disclosed the presence of the white-eye.

The weather was somewhat "heavy"; damp and misty, and threatening to rain. There was no wind as we began; the leaves of the trees were motionless...but after we had walked a half a mile along the trail, a breeze of perhaps five to seven miles per hour commenced, and continued to blow the rest of the day. It was warm as we climbed, and water-proofs were shed and left along the path as we went on.

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Passing into the area predominated by kukui and guava, a few small muted notes drifted up from the maze of green below, which were recognized as belonging to the Chinese thrush; a delicate song, tender and remote. Its notes were warm, and light as amber. The white-eye, with resounding scatter of song continued to follow our progress for the length of the trail; a friendly, companionable little nuisance, for above his sharper flood of notes it was difficult to discern voices more frail and farther away.

Upon reaching the lehua-koa forest, the bell notes of the elepaio floated up from the valleys below, and too, the lisping, sawing notes of the amakihi. However, until we reached the furthestmost parts of the trail, little could be seen of the elusive amakihi but a flash of dull green...and of the usually friendly elepaio, but a glimpse of white and tawny brown.

As we rounded a small rise near a bend of the trail, we chanced upon an apapane, close by and dazzlingly brilliant with his crimson body and black wings. The bird buzzed daintily from one lehua flower to another, sipping delicately, and all the while continuing his festoon of small utterances...a most beautiful little song; sweet yet strong, and though jumbled, clear and precise.

We walked on in the company of all, but especially of the amakihi, whose two modes of single utterance remained with us until we left the upper forests. Many times we heard the chimes of the hill robin, but not until we reached the last fifty yards below the highest rise did we view him closely. When we did it was at a range of perhaps five feet; there were at least nine in a small flock...darting in and out of the bushes and talking wildly for no apparent reason. The song of the hill robin is exquisite: I say "chimes" for the gently cascading intonations had a bell-like quality of which no collocation of letters could reproduce the accent.

One of our party thought he heard an iiwi from the crest of the highest hill, but a blast of wind swept away the sound and the bird somehow leaked out of the landscape. This crest was the peak of our ascent; we turned about at that point, and were off down the trail (not recording on the way down) to push on to the swampland.

Moanalua pond and the Kalihi flats offered a fair amount of bird-life. We began our search by "beating the bushes" for gallinules and "unbushed" four, one of which flew nearly under my feet, and we had an excellent view of it. There were a few plover about the pond, a night heron or so in the trees surrounding it, and the usual darting back-and-forth of cardinals and mynahs...but it was on the pond itself, and over it, that we saw our choice birds. The pond contained perhaps a hundred coot; three, four...perhaps six wandering tattlers, which we noticed were much darker than any other shore bird; a very few stilts; a sanderling; and a small flock of ruddy turnstones. In the air was seen a pair of mallards, and what began in the hazy distance as a white spot, and grew larger and larger in the circle of our binoculars, was an unmistakable ring-billed gull, for it flew nearly over our heads. On Kalihi flats in the harbor were many more turnstones and a few plover.

After a hurried lunch along the road, we were off across the Nuuanu Pali and nearing Kaelepulu pond. As we walked across the

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cow pastures, we noted many more cardinals, a few mynahs...and at every fifty paces, it seemed, a new group of plover, which upon being approached would cry the more loudly, leap into the air, and circle around the field to settle again like a swirl of wind-blown leaves in another part of the pasture.

Crossing over onto the flats of Kaelepulu we were greeted by the fragrance of salt marsh and shore mud and the loud nasal bleat of the Hawaiian stilt. There was a noble army of birds about the water's edge and off in the center of the pond, but until we crept nearer their identity was difficult to discern. There were golden plover; many of them; we counted as many as seventy-five in a single flock, and our total for the day numbered three hundred and eleven. The stilts numbered perhaps two hundred and were scattered over the whole water area; making short flights and calling incessantly. Coot were everywhere; in loose rafts on the water...and along the shore single birds dipped, or paddled along in the mud. A sanderling was noted, and a few more tattlers, but the most interesting of the shore birds were the ruddy turnstones; not in their antics particularly, for though colorful, their wheeling, tightly massed flight is a common sight...rather it was their plumage that caught the eye: surprising to all was the fact that nearly all wore their spring plumage...while those observed on Kalihi flats were mostly in their winter dress.

But a single pair of pintails was observed on the Kailua side of the pond, however, the far side yielded a flock of forty or more. Mr. Pearsall was well-rewarded after having ventured the weary trek around the pond to the far side, by viewing a pair of shoveler...and the most noteworthy find of the day, a pair of ruddy ducks.

Returning to the car, we observed from the mud flats, a lone skylark high in the air, and singing mightily.

We had watched anxiously for a frigate bird to stray within our limits, but none so chose to do, and our final compilations were unfortunately deprived of this magnificent bird.

The last stage of our journey took us around the point of the island to Kuupu pond. It was a disappointment for the most part; a coot or two, and they were shy and kept well to the furthestmost side. But though lacking in bird life, Kuupu pond lingers not unblessed in our memories, for it ended a most perfect day of bird-watching. Twenty-eight species were counted in all by the "forest-shore" group and as it dissolved, once again back in Honolulu, each member described it as having been a day well spent.

Summing it up, the Christmas count was a delightful experience and a pleasing success. Other than the ruddy duck which was of course a rare and excellent find, there were no rarities of tremendous import nor immense concentrations of individuals...but on the whole, the results obtained were entirely worthwhile; supplying a most satisfactory record of the avi-faunal fluctuations in a given area, which of course is the main purpose of the annual census. The meticulous statistics compiled are a most worthy tribute to those worthy ornithologists whose company the writer had the extreme pleasure of sharing.

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DECEMBER BIRD WALK. At 8:30 on the morning of December 16, several people started off on one of the better bird hikes of the year. Starting out from the Library of Hawaii, we picked up several people at the Aiea Postoffice, and started the long pull to the Aiea trail. Taking a human count at the beginning of the trail, we found eleven people, all the same species.

Starting on the trail, we saw several Kentucky cardinals. Then came a period of silence till we hit the lower fringes of the forest. There we heard many amakihi, and saw two of them. The little olive-green birds were hopping madly about, in almost utter disregard of the proximity of humans. It was then that we heard a strange call that nobody was able to identify. It turned out to be a Partridge (Mr. Robert Partridge) who had been with us all day. Farther along up the trail we ran into a section teeming with bird activity. We heard amakihi all along the way, but they lived up to the old rule that "little amakihi should be heard and not seen". Two of the party were lucky enough to see an apapane at a range of about twelve feet which was the only one seen that day. Several others were giving their strange, wheezy calls, but they wouldn't show themselves. A Chinese thrush was spotted by the sharp eyes of an eager observer, but he failed to oblige us with his sweet song.

Then again, silence reigned. A few of the party, Miss Hatch and some others, sat down to eat, but the rest, not knowing this, continued to ward off the horrors of hunger, and went on up the trail. At the top of a small hill these poor, tired souls rewarded their labours by sitting down to lunch. They heard what they thought was a hill robin, but they could n't see the bird. Finally, tired of waiting, they started down the trail, to find the others still eating!

The hike down was uneventful. We drove back into Honolulu, going our different ways, leaving the birds to play among themselves in peace
Manning Richards.

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Christmas greetings were received from a number of our absent members, among them Harold Cantlin, Howard Cogswell, Mrs. Ebert, Lieut. Fechtner, Lieut. Greenwood, Meyer E. Klein, Mr. and Mrs. Northwood, and Kendall V. Webb. Mahalo, and aloha nui!

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Members will be interested in the beautiful collection of bird pictures offered for sale by Mr. Donald Angus, at the Old House, opposite Thomas Square. These are loose prints from Rothschild's AVIFAUNA OF LAYSAN, and include many of our most beautiful Hawaiian birds.

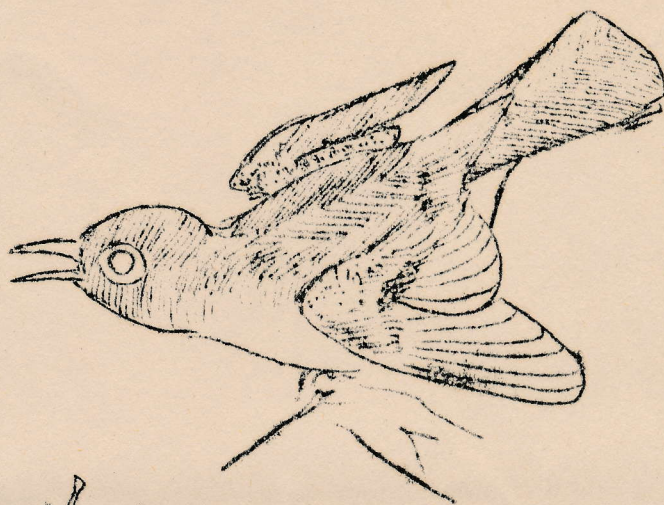
FEBRUARY BIRD WALK: To Poamoho, February 10th. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 8:30, or at Aiea Postoffice at 9:15.

FEBRUARY MEETING: February 18th, at the Library of Hawaii auditorium, at 7:30. Miss Hazel Peppin will show her colored motion pictures of Hawaiian birds, and Mr. Pearsall will show some of his insect slides.
HONOLULU AUDUBON SOCIETY.

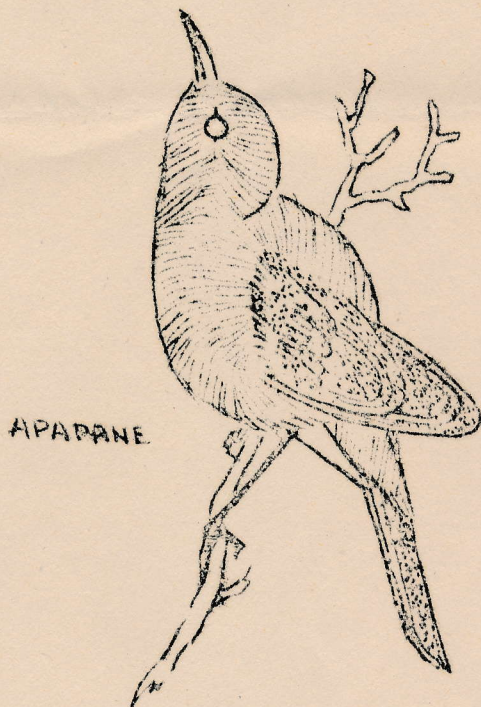
President, Mr. Gordon Pearsall, Makiki Hotel, 1661 Piikoi St., 1st V. Pres., Miss Grenville Hatch, 1548 Wilhelmina Rise; 2d V. Pres., Mr. Francis Evans, 132 A. Royal Circle; Sec.-Treas., Miss Blanche Anderson, 3669 Kawelolani Place, Honolulu 17, Advisors, George C. Munro, Major E. H. Bryan, Jr., Editor, THE ELEPAI O, Miss Charlotta Hoskins, 3212 Loulu St., Honolulu 54, Hawaii.

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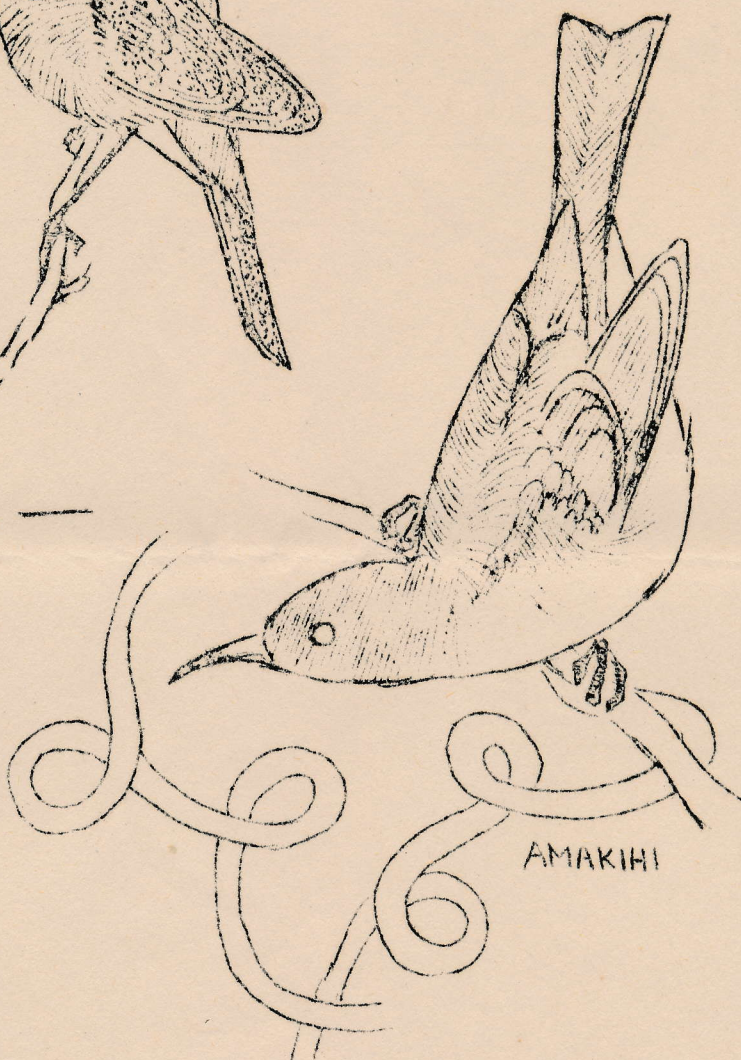


WHITE-EYE



APAPANE

FOREST BIRDS —

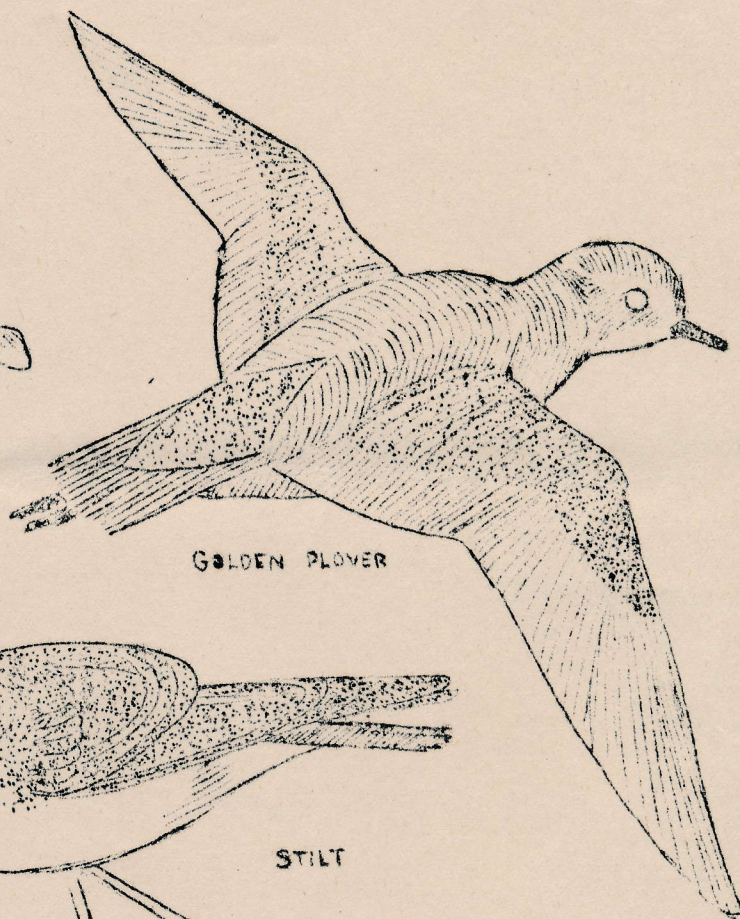


AMAKIHI

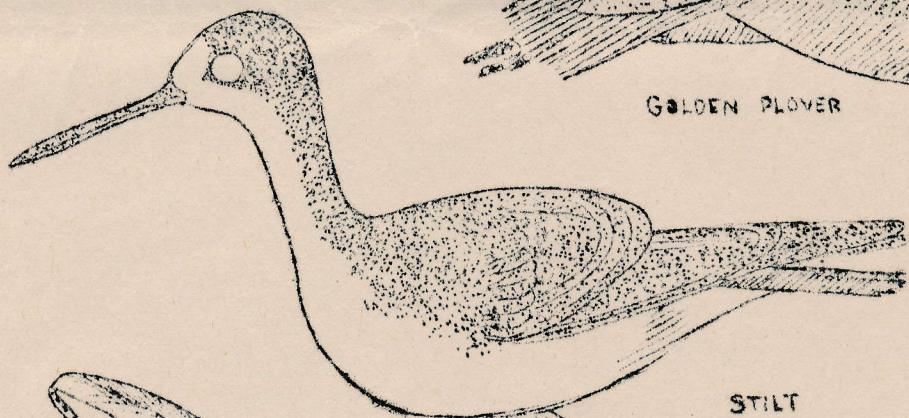
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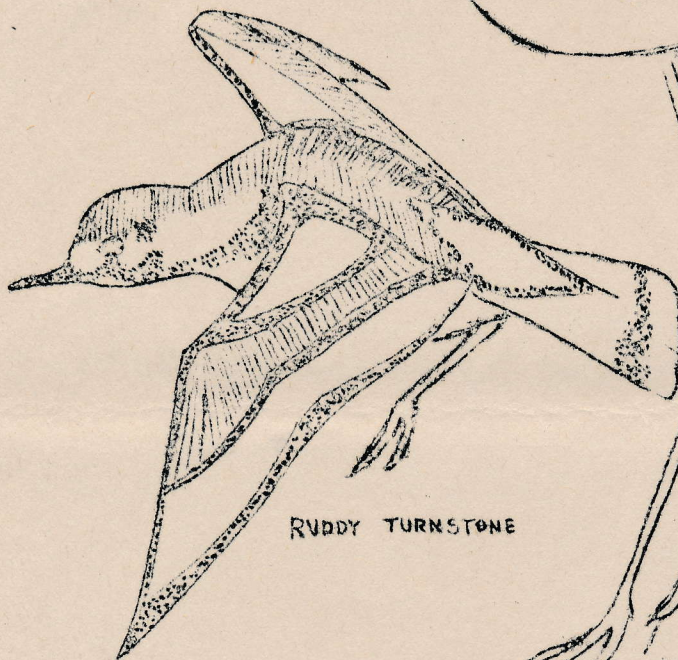
SANDERLING



GOLDEN PLOVER



STILT



RUDDY TURNSTONE

SHORE BIRDS —

Bus Peterson