

# THE ELEPAIO

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For the Better Protection of Wildlife in Hawaii

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## KAELEPULU POND

We are happy to bring to our members the following letter from the Bishop Estate, assuring the birds on Kaelepulu pond protection. It has been a matter of great concern to all of us that the Oahu areas suitable for shore birds and water fowl have been so largely destroyed during the last few years. Kaelepulu pond, which lies behind Lanikai, is one of the few places remaining to these birds. The trustees of the Bishop Estate have the gratitude and thanks of all bird lovers for their far-sighted and public spirited action in providing protection for the birds

"In further reference to your letter of December 10, 1945, I would advise that the Trustees voted to continue Lease 5950 to Lawrence W. Campos covering the Kaelepulu Pond and Stream on a holdover basis terminable on 30 days' notice, with the provision that there will be no shooting nor hunting on the premises. It is unlikely that under this holdover arrangement the Lessee will drain the pond or fill it or change its contour in any way.

"With regard to the desire of the members of your society to visit the pond to observe bird life we refer you to Mr. Campos who as Lessee should control such activity." ... (signed, H. K. Keppler, for Secretary

## FIELD NOTES

by Rus Peterson

On the afternoon of December 29th 1945, Mr. Ralph Andrews, Lt. Robert J. Watson and myself made an attempt to reach Moku Manu. The venture failed, for we were turned back by heavy seas before being able to effect a landing. However, this particular attempt was noteworthy in the fact that we were able to reach a point within a half mile of the island before having to turn about, and were able to compile some data, at least, concerning the December bird population.

Brown boobies definitely do inhabit the island in December, as do also the red-footed; we observed both at close range. The frigate birds are present in fair numbers. We were unable to identify the shearwaters, but they, and the terns, are to be seen in abundance.

Circling over the island toward evening, at least two thousand birds could be seen: milling like bees about a hive; a truly magnificent sight. Most, we agreed, must have been boobies, though certain identification was impossible in the face of such difficulties.



LAYSAN ISLAND IN 1891  
by George C. Munro  
continued from last issue

Guano was shipped in the summer only and a caretaker left in charge during the off season. A resident of the island had lived there alone for six months as caretaker. For company he made friends with a flock of curlew which swarmed to his door when he shook the moths from a cloth which hung on the wall outside. Every morning the folds of this cloth were full of large moths which the birds easily caught when shaken out as they took only short flights. In after years a lone caretaker died at his post and was found by a calling vessel sitting in his chair at the table where death had overtaken him some time before.

On one day during our stay, there were four sea captains a shore; Captain Berry of the guano schooner, "Mary Foster", Captain Cook, veteran of many storms, Captain F. D. Walker, famed as Master of the "Wandering Minstrel" which was wrecked at Midway Island in 1888 (an episode furnishing the inspiration for several literary works and graphically described in the recently published "John Cameron's Odyssey" by Andrew Farrel) and Captain Freeth, Governor of Laysan Island by appointment of the Government of Hawaii then in the reign of King Kalakaua. Among the crew of the "Mary Foster" was a Japanese naval officer who had taken the highest examinations in his line of study his country afforded and was working as seaman on foreign ships to gain experience. He was getting a unique kind at Laysan handling sacks of guano.

At the time of our visit there were seventeen residents on the island; the manager, his two white overseers, Chinese cook and thirteen laborers. Captain Freeth's two sons were also on vacation there. The removal of guano had not long been started. Four houses, a warehouse and a light tower about thirty feet high with a flagpole above and a laboratory beneath for testing the guano had been built. A carline led out to the guano field. The mules for hauling the cars grazed on the natural vegetation of the island and were in excellent condition. A few hogs roamed around, feeding on the dead albatross and no doubt eating the eggs and live young of other birds.

The island--lying north and south, a little longer than broad, less than two square miles in area--had the appearance of a raised atoll, with a sand rim rising to about forty feet in height and depressed in the center. This depression was occupied by an extremely salt lagoon four or five fathoms deep with a bare flat at the south end partly covered with water in the wet season. Most of the surface was covered with a tufty grass about three feet high, shrubs a little higher and creeping plants lying close to the ground. About double the number of species of plants was represented as compared with the number on Lisiansky, one hundred miles to the northwest, the next largest island of the chain.

The remnant of a grove of palms of the genus *Prichardia* grew at the bottom of the inner slope of the sand rim at the north end of the lagoon. There were but two low trees alive, and the dry stumps of a number of others evidently at one time a thriving group of trees but then apparently in declining condition. Photographs of these are in the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, taken probably after our visit. In 1859 Captain Brooks reported seeing five trees fifteen feet high. It is doubtful if botanical specimen of this interesting tree have



ever been collected or the species described. It may, as suggested by Professor Rock, be the same species as abounds on Nihoa lying six-hundred miles to the southeast. However, judging from its position on the inside of the sand rim of the island and the variation with restricted distribution on the main Hawaiian group, the probability is that it was a distinct species, especially as Laysan has been so long isolated as to develop several endemic species of birds. What caused its decline? Perhaps the trampling of the increasing albatross killed the seedlings or more likely the Laysan finch eventually devoured all the fruit, leaving none to produce seedlings and the trees died of old age.

There were at that time twenty-five different kinds of birds on the island and the numbers must have run into millions. I counted the birds on sections of ground covered with young of the Laysan albatross and concluded that they would reach those vast numbers without counting the old birds. Estimates as high as ten million albatross have been made by others. Figures such as these have, however, been justifiably disputed by later visiting zoologists who were able to make a more complete study and survey of the birds. In 1911, after plume hunters had decimated the albatross colony, Professor Homer R. Dill made a careful estimate of over 1,016,000 of all the birds on the island. He concluded that one-sixth of the albatross remained, numbering about 180,000.

The air over the land was full of birds--frigate birds up so high as to appear mere specks in the blue and close above the surface over the rookeries the tern were in thousands. The top of the scrub was covered with nesting birds, the ground surface under the shrubbery was occupied by other species and below the ground there were many more in burrows. Numbers were on the sandy surface between the grass bunches. Around the lagoon and on the open guano flat young albatross were packed. The belt of bare sand just above high watermark harbored the black "goonie" (Diomedea nigripes) and the small amount of raised coral rock at the south end of the island also had its occupants.

In places the noise was deafening--a medley of sounds, ranging from the incessant shrill cries of the sooty tern (Sterna fuliginosa, now Sterna fuscata oahuensis) which never ceased day or night, the groans of the albatross, harsh squawks of the gannet and tropic birds and the melancholy moans and wails of the shearwater, to the sweet songs of the finch, flycatcher or "millor bird" and red honeyeater.

There were one or two species of lizards and several of large moths which were in great numbers. Flies and beetles attacked the drying birdskins and bird ticks bit our bare feet causing intolerable itching. Ants, earwigs and spiders were also present.

Here was a paradise for the naturalist--an almost unworked field. An interesting year could have been spent studying the birds, noting the order and time of their leaving and return, observing the plant and insect life of the island, and the marine life of the shore and reef. How interesting it would be to follow the sixteen species of sea birds on their ocean wanderings when they leave the island deserted (but for the land birds and perhaps some of the waders) at the end of the breeding season, until they find their way back to the little speck of land in the middle of the ocean at the beginning of the next laying season. Perhaps sometime a birdbanding expedition will be made to the island and much more information obtained as to the range of these birds.

To be continued.



BIRD STUDY ABOARD A TRANSPORT TO THE WESTERN PACIFIC, (Conclusion)  
By Howard L. Cogswell

May 10. - To within about 150 miles of Namonuito Is. in northern Carolines. No birds seen nor reported to me all day.

May 11 - About 130 miles north of Grimes I. in Carolines in A. M. and 200 miles due south of Guam at dusk.

Petrel or storm-petrel (sp.?). A single large dark petrel glimpsed as it disappeared around the bow, late P.M.

May 12 - Into anchorage at Ulithi atoll at 1100.

Common Noddy. 3)-- All seen offshore during the two hours of our  
White Tern. 18)-- approach to the atoll.

Single white terns also occasionally flew across the lagoon during the next three days, which we spent lying at anchor in the same spot.

May 15 - A large dark bird flew across the lagoon at 0930 with the slow flapping flight of a heron. I did not have binoculars with me at the time, but later observations at Okinawa lead me to believe that it was a Reef Heron (Demigretta sacra).

We sailed late that afternoon and headed east, then north and north west (after dark) of Ulithi.

May 16 - To about 300 miles NNW of Ulithi at dusk.

White-faced (?) Shearwater (Puffinus leucomelas). 3 large shearwaters seen during the morning with white underparts and dark brown upper parts were probably this species. They were so large they appeared almost albatross-like in the distance. No close views.

May 17 - Nearest land(at dawn): Ulithi - 400 miles; Guam -450 mile. No birds seen all day, but one shearwater reported to me by another man.

May 18 - Continuing on northwestward, to about 650 miles from Okinawa at dusk.

Brown Booby (Sula leucogaster). A single bird at 0650 flew over the bow of the ship at about 35 feet altitude--close enough that I could see minute details of its plumage and the light bluish bill with no external nostrils. This bird was about 150 miles from land in approximately lat. 18° N., long., 135° E., SSW of Parece Vela I.

Porpoises were seen several times during the day, at least two different kinds. One school of 6 or more in the A. M. were fairly large and all dark-brown above, and merely rolled their backs up out of the surface. Two schools seen in the afternoon were light grayish brown above to pale grayish on the underside, especially the throat. These latter were under 6 feet in length but so active that they frequently jumped clear of the water, even leaping straight up a good ten feet and turning around in mid-air to plunge back into the water head first.

May 19 - To within 400 miles of Okinawa and less than 200 from small outlying islets at dusk. Yet no birds seen all day. Hard showers most of the afternoon of the 19th and morning of the 20th.

May 20 - To about 150 miles of less, SE, of Okinawa at dusk.

White-faced Shearwater. One seen at 1545 well enough to see the whitish sides of the head. In fact at a little distance the entire head



appears white.

Storm-petrel (sp.?) 2 dark birds of this type, rather large for storm-petrels and therefore possibly Bulwer's petrels, were seen in early P. M. Two other shearwaters or petrels were seen at too great a distance even to guess at their identity.

Red-tailed (?) tropic-bird. One seen at quite a distance over the waves at 1500.

May 21 - A few miles out of sight of land southeast of Okinawa a small perching bird about the size of a sparrow or somewhat larger flew around the bow of the ship several times, hesitating near the rigging as though about to alight, then continued on to the northwest toward land. The brief glimpse I had of it left a definite impression of red in the plumage, but that is all. Being my first experience with a land bird migrating over the ocean I wanted to identify it desperately, but soon it had gone on through the mist and low clouds to an unseen island it knew was there.

Coming into Nakagusuku Wan (now Buckner Bay) on the southeast side of Okinawa six terns were seen which appeared so white I considered them most likely Gygis alba again, but later when I had learned how white the Black-naped Tern (Sterna sumatrana) seems at a moderate distance I realized they might have been either species.

Now only one leg of our ocean journey was left. To the tune of our warships shelling the then enemy held positions in southern Okinawa some of us boarded an L.C.I. for the roughest ride any of us ever hope to make. Bucking swells which shook it to every bolt and rivet, the tiny craft took us around the southern end of Okinawa to the western side, where we went ashore the following day. The only bird I noted during this trip, while I held firmly to the upper dock rail to keep my feet under me, was a Brown Booby -- slightly indistinct because of the spray from our plunging bow. The next day I began land bird study once more -- and happily too, for I am not a seafarer at heart.

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JANUARY BIRD WALK. On January 13th the group met at the library of Hawaii at 8:30 A.M. By 8:45 a count of noses showed fourteen present and we started off in cars for Kahuku Pond. The day was sunny but very windy. We stopped a few minutes at the Pali to view the sunshine blanketed green valley that spread out below us. The wind was so strong that we could scarcely walk against it and literally had the shirts blown off our backs.

Driving down the other side and along the Kamohamoha highway to Kahuku pond the usual common birds were seen. Mynah birds perched along the roadside or flew from tree to tree, flashing their conspicuous, whitewing patches. The gentle little dark-barred, buff Barred Doves were everywhere. Occasionally the larger Chinese Doves were seen. English Sparrows perched along the roadside and occasionally a flash of crimson told us we had seen a Cardinal. White-eyes were seen in the trees. When we stopped at a roadside stand for a few minutes tiny black-chinned brown Rice Birds were seen unconcernedly pecking the seeds of weeds and roadside grasses.

Arriving at the pond area we parked the cars near the ocean after driving through a large field of red and yellow gaillardias. As we walked along the ocean beach a brown-mottled immature Glaucous Gull,



the largest of the mainland gulls occasionally seen here, soared by, riding the strong wind effortlessly. Approaching the pond we noticed two ducks on the water near the shore. Identified through glasses, they were found to be a pair of Greater Scaup Ducks. The male had a metallic-greenish head. As we approached several Golden Plover, in brownish-winter plumage, arose from the shore and flew to a safer place. On a muddy point a number of coots were standing on one log while others were feeding in the shallow water. The ivory-white bill was an easily identifiable mark of identification. A mottled, juvenile Night Heron arose from the rushes and flapped to the far end of the pond. At this time we noticed several boys working with a net, seining fish, along the embankment on which a railroad track ran from the sugar mill. This frightened the birds away in the pond along this side of the embankment.

We returned to the road, following it across a foot bridge, over a channel from the pond to the ocean, to a kiawe grove. Here we stopped to eat our lunch, and rest. Among the rushes near here a gallinule was flushed from its hiding place and went spluttering across the water, its red bill showing conspicuously. More fishermen were arriving and the birds were moving over to the large pond on the other side of the railroad embankment.

After lunch, part of the group decided to return to the cars. The rest of us hiked along the embankment toward the sugar mill, and from there to the cars. Several Night Herons were feeding or standing statue-like in the shallow water. Along the far shore about a hundred Coots and Gallinules were feeding in the shallow water or resting on the mud banks. Mingled with them were about 35 Pintail ducks, two pair of Mallards and a pair of Shovelers. In the deeper water three pairs of Lesser Scaup ducks were diving for food. The males had dark-purplish heads and were smaller than the Greater Scaups. On the mud flats Pacific Golden Plover were feeding along with Ruddy Turnstones, who had black bars across their white breasts. Grayish-white Sanderlings and smoky-gray Wandering Tattlers were feeding along the shore or scurried about over the flats. In the shallow water black and white Stilts stalked about on long spindly legs.---Gordon Pearsall

oOo

Mr. James H. Phelps, who has just left the service, writes that on his last voyage, returning from Saipan on a great circle course north of Midway, he saw "...numbers of Bonin Petrels and a pair of Red-tailed Tropic Birds at 30° north, or thereabouts". We wish him good birding in Montana!

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MARCH BIRDWALK. Meet at Library of Hawaii, at 8:30 A. M., or at Aiea Post Office at 9:15, March 10th for Poamoho, weather permitting. This trip cannot be made in rainy weather.

Meeting: Library of Hawaii, at 7:30, March 18th. Program to be announced.

#### HONOLULU AUDUBON SOCIETY

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