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BIRDS ON MOLOKAI

By George C. Munro

Manning Richards in the "Elepaio" of November 1946 writes of the Molokai birds or rather the absence of birds there. He says he has the challenge of "Where - are - the - birds - on - Molokai?" I am glad he has this challenge and hope he takes it up. The following notes may help him and others in this search.

I lived on the island of Molokai for seven years. I rode horseback over its open country and shoresides constantly and occasionally traversed its mountain forests; all the time keeping a good lookout for birds. During my management of the Molokai ranch (1899-1906) I did not have time for extensive bird research. But for a week or two in 1907 I collected birds in the bay at Palaa and in the rain forest above Pelekunu Valley. During the Bird Survey in 1936 I spent a month exclusively in a study of birds on Molokai.

Scott B. Wilson who with Evans wrote the Birds of the Sandwich Islands collected there in 1887 or 1888. He stayed with the Meyer family and taught some of the boys to preserve and mount bird skins and some specimens of the rarest birds are still in the possession of the Meyer family. Mr. H. C. Palmer, Lord Rothschild's collector, worked over Molokai in 1893. He found the Molokai oo which was then new to science. Dr. R. C. L. Perkins spent several months on Molokai in 1893 and discovered the Molokai mamoo. He again collected for a short time in the early 1900s. The Meyer boys collected extensively in the 1890s and cleared the mamoo from the forest above Pelekunu Valley where they hunted. William Alanson Bryan made a rather exhaustive search for birds on Molokai in 1907 and obtained three specimens of the mamoo above Moanui, farther round to the east end. When hunting deer in 1904 on the wooded sides of the cliff overlooking Waikolu Valley I had a close view of a group of the oo. They chattered around me for quite a time and eventually the lure of the collector overcame the conservationist or humanitarian and like a vandal I shot one with a bullet. A portion of the skin with the head and one wing attached is in the Bishop Museum, the last authentic record of the species' being seen.

At one time the Molokai forests swarmed with native birds. They used to frequent the gardens at Kalae where the Meyer family lived, probably up to the early 1880s. Wilson said he procured his three specimens of the kakawahie (*Parorcomyza*) at Kalae, probably in some native forest about a mile from the homestead.

Up to 1907 the common birds were quite numerous in the upper rain forest. But in 1936 in a month of search I saw only one solitary native bird, an apapane calling in a tree top. At that time a water survey was making trails through what was formerly impenetrable forest. Without a trail one had to travel on the vegetation several feet from the ground and made very slow progress. I travelled miles of these trails watching and listening for native birds in vain. Walter Donaghho traversed many of these trails after I did with little better success. Evidences of mongooses were everywhere, but not being tree climbers they could not have had much to do with the decrease of the perching birds.

There are some places on Molokai and along its shores that have not been investigated for native birds. One is the swampy plateau between the Pelekunu and Wailau Valleys; the valleys and cliffs; and little islands of the north side of the east end. The plateau, remote from the influences that decimated the birds in the main forest, may be a refuge for the perching birds. Some surprising sights may await the hardy naturalist who succeeds in penetrating its fastnesses. The native trail up the cliffs from Pelekunu, once used by the native bird catchers will now be impossible to find. It traversed precipitous cliffs up which the hunting dogs had to be hoisted. But the Water Survey may have made trails on to it by an easier route if searched for before they become overgrown. Shearwaters, small petrel, boobies, frigate birds and tern may nest on the little islands to the east of Kalaupapa promontory. I landed on Mokuhoniki, off the east end in 1936 and found wedge-tailed shearwaters and white-tailed tropic birds nesting there. Tropic birds probably nest in the cliffs on the north side of the west end of Molokai. I think I once saw evidences of noddies or the Hawaiian tern nesting there. There is not much hope of being able to make any investigation in the precipitous cliffs between Kalaupapa and the Momomi sandhills. Richards mentions boobies but I have never seen any near the coasts of Molokai. He may have mistaken white-tailed tropic birds for boobies. The regular migratory pintail, shoveller and other straggling ducks, geese and waders come to the south and east coasts, also the kolea and akekeke. The curlew and stilt used to come also and the former sometimes came up on the pasture lands. Aukuu still frequents the shores. The native duck undoubtedly mixed with the other ducks at Palaau, and Perkins mentions it on the mountain bog. Pheasants were common in the open spaces on the mountain. Rock-pigeons, doves, skylarks, ricebirds and linnets frequented the open country, and quail and doves were common in the shoreside algaroba forests. During the survey I took specimens of the bar-shouldered dove on every island. I found them all of the same species Geopelia striata striata. It was very common on Molokai in 1936. It had been introduced from the Malays to Australia and from Australia to Hawaii.

When I was on Molokai in 1936 native birds may have been in the wooded cliffs on the north side or on the plateau mentioned and may have since spread over the forests, so that a search over the water trails may bring us good news.

I think the wedge-tailed shearwater used to nest on an open ridge above Kamalo, Molokai, and still does on Mokuhoniki off the east coast. The dark-rumped petrel nested in immense numbers on the plateau mentioned before and the natives went and took the young yearly and latterly took the old birds as well. The mongoose cleaned it out on Molokai and also Newell's shearwater which nested lower down among the cliffs. There is little chance of either being still on Molokai though they may be nesting now on Kauai. It is possible that the smaller petrels, Bulwer's, Tristram's, and the Hawaiian storm petrel may nest in the cliffs and small islands. The frigate bird used to fly over the Molokai lands but I think they were from Mokumanu off Oahu.

So Manning Richards and anyone else wishing to take it up have quite a field for bird study on Molokai. All I will ask of them if they visit the small islands is to gather some seed of the native plants and send it to me for planting in an experiment for native shoreside plants of Kapapa Island in Kaneohe Bay. There is an extremely rare Euphorbia munroi, named by Rock for my brother James that I saw growing on Mokuhoniki in 1936 and there may be other rare or new plants on some of the small islands off the coast of Molokai.

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JOURNAL OF ORNITHOLOGICAL WORK IN HAWAII NATIONAL PARK
DURING THE SUMMER OF 1937 (continued)

By Walter R. Donaghho

JUNE 14: Today we met Mr. Lamb, the Park Naturalist, who took us over to his office in the grounds of the museum at Uwekahuna Bluffs, where he read our outlines of the summer's work that we had prepared for Mr. Wingate, and gave us more to do. One item in particular was a study of the status of the nene. He wants us to find this bird and get an official record of its existence and to make any studies possible of it.

After lunch at the camp, we visited the Kipuka Puaulu, or Bird Park. I circled the kipuka, taking a list of birds. I was disappointed however, as I heard only a few birds; mostly linnets. Apapane were not rare further back in the tops of the tall ohias. Hill robins were common, and we could hear them singing from time to time. Also heard a few iiwi and saw two.

I returned, upon reaching camp again, to the nest seen yesterday. I climbed up the tree as quietly as I could, but when I got even with the nest, the bird flew off. I saw that it was an amakihi. Again I waited, first in the tree nearby, then on the ground, but the bird didn't return.

JUNE 15: Mr. Lamb was to take us to Napau crater this morning, but he came and said it was postponed until the afternoon. Instead we went down the Cockett trail as far as Puhimau, one of the chain of craters.

Saw a lot of birds, mostly apapane, with scattered numbers of hill robins, elepaio and amakihi. Just off the road at the trail's start, Harold shot a hill robin, which I have just finished skinning. He also shot an elepaio, or at least, so it seemed to him, but we searched the area and the elepaio was not forthcoming. Upon reaching Kokoolau crater, we sat down upon the stone wall and looked into its forest filled depths. Apapane were flitting about among the trees, ever bent upon securing their sips of nectar and elepaioes were "whitting" in the ohias near us, and we watched them as they flitted about, cocking their tails. One amakihi fed for a fairly long time in the trees nearest us. We could see it race up and down the branches and pass quickly over and through the foliage in quest of insects, now and then pausing to sip at a blossom.

Upon coming to the crater of Puhimau, we found it a sanctuary for numbers of mynahs.

This afternoon Mr. Lamb came for us. Piling in the back of his car, we sped quickly down the road to Makaopuhi, where the trail to Napau began on the east side. The forest was open, a great percentage of the trees having died out. Soon we passed through a bit of dense woodland, with Hapuu growing underneath. Ieie vines twined around and up the limbs of the ohias. This forest gave way to the usual open type and the large tree fern to the smaller, hapuu-ii. Then through another patch of dense forest and out again into open country. The dense forest surrounded this on the north and the east. Fumaroles steamed here and there among the scrub ohias. Birds were quite common in the dense stands of forest; amakihi, apapane and elepaio. I noted the scarcity of hill robins, only one heard.

Napau crater was very interesting. It is a hundred feet deep and has a flat bottom, three quarters of a mile in width. One can see, directly across on the east rim, where the 1922 eruption broke out and poured down over the rim of the crater.

JUNE 16: After lunch, I rode up with Hyer to the Park office, then started out to find the bridle path leading through the fern forest west of the Volcano House. First I tried the road that led back from the hotel and walked a mile down it to the path. It led through ohia much like that around the camp, except for the puluhi fern. Apapane were about the only birds I saw and they were fairly common. Coming to a sign reading "To Brown's Camp", I followed that trail. It skirted the real fern forest and came out into open grassy country scattered with a few ohias. The forest, in a dying condition, edged away from it on the right. Among the ohias I noticed many olapa.

I wanted to follow a path along a high bank in the rear of the Brown's Ranch home pastures and so I left the trail to follow one of many leading off into the forest. When I came to the edge of the jungle I was not near the bank. A lot of second growth ohia grew about, which harbored a great many elepaio. I cut out across country toward the bank and after a little trouble brought up to it. I then passed through a spoiled forest of ohia, kopiko and koa, under which the undergrowth had been cleared by cattle. A good many apapane, mostly in small companies numbering up to seven or eight flew overhead. A pair of iiwi were seen in a small stand of large ohia. Pheasants were calling from the open grassy pasturelands much too near, as these birds do not belong here. The land belongs to the iiwi, apapane, akialoa, akiapolaau, and other Hawaiian forms that will never haunt these areas again.

I visited a hawk's nest where I saw a young bird just out of the nest during the summer of 1935. The nest was now empty.

JUNE 18: Went up the slope of Mauna Loa to the end of the truck trail at 7000 feet elevation, where we got out to explore an open region covered with pukeawe and grass, with scattered groves of koa and mamani trees. We made our way over to a kipuka of koa about a hundred yards up the slope from the end of the road, and upon entering, noted three olive green creepers running over the limbs. Harold shot one of them for a specimen. An amakihi came into the kipuka and he missed in attempts to get it as a specimen. We made our way down to a smaller kipuka that was more open underneath. Elepaio called from a distance, and apapane sat in the koa trees of the grove. Going on to a larger grove further down the slope, we found three more creepers in a solitary koa running over the limbs. It was fascinating to watch them as they ran up and down, over the side to cling to the underside, and running up the bottom of the limb. In the kipuka itself were amakihi and a pair of elepaio. I also saw a bird fly into a koa near me. It then flew over my head to a solitary mamani up the hill. It shone brilliant orange in the bright sunlight and I recognized the akopiui. We followed it to the kipuka that we had first visited and heard a strange guttural note that we supposed came from it. It then vanished over the slope beyond, toward the dense koa forests of Keawenai, where it was doubtless bound; the area being a favorable habitat for this species.

Returning to the road, we started up the Mauna Loa trail. The trail led up past the koa and mamani into open country covered with low ohelo, leponene, scrub ohia and other plants. Apapane and amakihi frequented the ohia. Once I heard an amakihi utter the strangest notes I have ever heard from the species; a series of varied notes sounding at times like a silver bell and at others like an English sparrow, and several other varied chips and chirps. They somewhat resembled the song of an anauanii that I once heard on Kauai.

We lunched on the trail and started back to the car. Then we drove down the mountain, stopping at koa groves on the way to see what kind of birds they had to offer. Each one had its elepaio, and amakihi were also frequently found. Three more creepers were seen, of which two were obtained as specimens.

Down at around the 5000 foot level we heard goats nearby and Harold set out to stalk them with his camera. I explored the forest of ohia and mamani that grew out on an old lava flow. At one end grew a patch of koa. Elepaio and amakihi were encountered in fair numbers. I also saw a pair of iiwi in a high ohia tree that grew off to itself on the lava.

I walked on down the road as far as I could get before Harold picked me up. The native birds grew scarce; in fact, disappeared as I got farther down, and an open forest of large koa was inhabited only by linnets and mynahs. A pair of valley quail was encountered upon entering the forest, and blue pheasants were calling from the open country beyond.

To be continued

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FIELD NOTES: "I spent six days the last of February 1947 at the Volcano Observatory Hawaii National Park, on the island of Hawaii, and incidental to the library work I was doing there, was able to make some bird observations. The temperature ranged from very warm to very cold with a minimum of 44 degrees Fahrenheit. There were two bright sunny days, the other days were cold with rain varying from a light drizzle to heavy, steady rain. In spite of these varying climatic conditions, there was almost always some type of bird life within sight and/or hearing. This Kilauea-Mauna Loa region of the Park ranges from heavy forestation to barren, desert-like regions, and there were birds in all sections.

"The apapane is the most abundant native, permanent resident to be found in the Park. There were hundreds of them flying about in the trees in the Park residence area where I stayed, and there I was able to see them at very close range. I was particularly interested in their call which varies from 3 to 7 notes on the same pitch. They have a beautiful song besides this flute-like call. One late afternoon I saw a pair of apapane which for a moment, because of their large size, I mistook for iiwi, but when they flew over me I saw the tell-tale white patch under the tail and the straight black beak. Iiwi are numerous in the Park, but I was not fortunate enough to see them.

"I was surprised to see a small group of mejiros feeding in a tree outside the Volcano House, for they are supposed to be rare here. In a triangular area, the Volcano Observatory, Volcano House, and Park residence area, I observed the liothrix lutea, a few mynahs, one cardinal acting as if he weren't such a stranger to these parts, a group of ricebirds, turtle doves (which made me wishful for Wisconsin) and some English sparrows.

"One sunny morning I drove up the Mauna Loa truck trail to the seismograph cellar with Dr. Howard Powers, seismologist of the Park. Along the grassy slopes of the mountain, called Kipuka Kulalio, there were Pacific golden plover, skylarks, and a covey of California valley quail. We watched and watched for a glimpse of the Japanese pheasant, but had no luck. While Dr. Powers changed the drum on the seismograph, and explained its intricacies to a group of people who had made the trip with us, I sat outside the cellar on a boulder of lava and watched some apapane and amakihi cavort in the koa and ohia trees. I tried calling to them, but my amateurish attempts at imitating their calls and songs obviously classed me in their

eyes as something lower than a malihini for they chattered excitedly and then flew away to the top of the highest tree they could find. On the return trip in the grassy plain we saw what Dr. Powers thought was an olive creeper and what I thought was an amakihi, so we agreed to let it go unrecorded. Someday I should like to go back and spend a lot of time on this grassy area on the slope of Mauna Loa called Kipuka Kulalio where many of the birds known to exist in the Park can be found. Here the trees are not so high as in the Bird Park, or the vegetation so thick that it is not easy to observe the different species.

"I made a field trip with Mr. Finch to road the rain guages located in and around Kilauea crater and along the Chain of Craters road. We were lucky enough to see two white-tailed tropic birds soaring about the rim of Halemaumau. They seemed to be enjoying the dust and stiff breeze much better than we. Mr. Finch told me that it is thought that this bird nests in Kilauea crater and in Halemaumau. Inasmuch as they only feed at sea, it seems like quite a long daily round trip to make between board and room. Along the Chain of Craters road I observed the inevitable apapane, golden plover, some doves, and a few ricebirds. On the return trip to the Observatory we went to the Thurston Lava Tube and there I looked in vain for the iiwi which are supposed to be rather numerous in that region.

"The last bird I saw on the island of Hawaii was one lone, brave, devil-may-care mynah flapping to windward across a drenched airport in a driving rain - a rain storm which had grounded all Hawaiian Airlines planes, but not Mr. Mike Mynah."

Priscilla M. Griffey

"March 9, 1947: The field trip of the Hawaii Audubon Society was led by Forester Thomas R. L. McGuire, who pointed out plants and trees along the way. Twenty-two members and guests found the trail Pupukea-Kahuku a delight with its native flowers and trees and ocean views. The naupaka, dainty and fragrant, was blooming there, and the ilima. The pluchio indica, having been hauled in with the coral from the beach for the road, was as well established as though it were a native of the uplands. Bird songs were shy and not many were seen. The elopaio, amakihi and hill robin were heard all along the way, and Chinese thrush provided a rare treat with a real concert, living up to the reputation of being the best songster on the islands.

"The group lunched by the stream Oio, called OTen by the soldier boys, then made our way back to the parked cars. Going down to the highway we saw the native owl, resting beside the road; it flew over and perched on a shrub. I hope all the party had the pleasure of seeing it."

Ruth Ebert

"On March 16th, two members of the Society traversed the lower part of Kipapa trail, bent on showing visiting bird students some of our native birds. We found the trail had been cleared for some distance, and the dirt road leading to it improved. Elepaio were numerous, responding to call readily. Hill robin were common also, and seemed less furtive than usual. Several small flocks of six or eight were seen. The song and call of the amakihi sounded constantly, but the shy little bird eluded our sight. A persistent drizzle finally turned us toward home, but not before two apapane were seen on one of the few ohia trees in blossom."

Grenville Hatch

"...I continue to hear the noddies flying low over the barracks (at Kaneohe) nearly every night. While walking home from the gunnery school this evening around nine o'clock the sky overhead was filled with the mellow cries of flocking shore-birds. Unfortunately I was unable to identify the calls. They definitely weren't plover is all I can say. These moonlit nights appear to increase their activity."

C. Fennell

"It was cold that December evening on the edge of Kilauea. The camping party set about building a fire of dead ohia branches while daylight dissolved in shades of rose and lavender and the stark purple outline of Mauna Loa was outlined against the darkening sky.

"Hush', said someone softly. We looked up.

"The air seemed filled with darting rubies, which swooped past our heads and rose, seemingly from the vast blackness of the crater hundreds of feet below. Faint eerie notes sounded around us while each tiny darting feathered thing reflected the full glory of the setting sun.

"They are apapane', the Audubon Society member remarked, as one lit on the branch of a stunted ohia near by.

"We know the bird was fifty feet away, but so clear was the air that he seemed much nearer. His tiny body was rosy crimson; his wings and tail were black as were his sickle bill and feet. He swayed there for a moment and then darted upward, always omitting that faint, yet piercing cry.

"The shadows deepened and a cold air current arose from the crater. The apapane were gone. We drew closer to the fire."

Lorin T. Gill

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The HUI MANU brought in by clipper on March 20th, twenty-four pairs of Mexican rainbow buntings. These have been taken to the William L. Mitchell estate in Kaneohe to become acclimated before release. The HUI plans to bring in seventy-five pairs, all told.

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MAY ACTIVITIES:

BIRD WALK: May 11th, to Peanoho. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 8:30.

MEETING: May 19th, 7:30 p.m., in the auditorium of the Library of Hawaii.

Mr. James A. H. Wilder, President of the Hui Manu, will speak on the program for that organization.

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HAWAII AUDUBON SOCIETY: President, Miss Grenville Hatch, 1548 Wilhelmina Rise; Vice-Presidents, Mr. Francis Evans, 132-A Royal Circle; Mr. E. B. Hamilton, 528 17th St.; Sec'-Treasurer, Mrs. Blanche A. Pedley, 3770 Sierra Drive; Editor, The Elepaio, Miss Charlotta Hoskins, 3212 Loulu St., Honolulu, Hawaii.

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