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A CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS IN HAWAII

By Helen Shiras Baldwin

"Kilauea Iki Crater and Kipuka Puauulu, --- Dec. 17, 6 A.M. to 1:30 P.M. Fair ---." How bare the official record looks. How little it tells of what we saw and felt. What was our census trip really like?

It was dark when we census-takers gathered at Kipuka Puauulu. Who but old-timers would guess as we lit matches to read the thermometer that in fifteen minutes it would be full daylight? But while we stood there, hands in pockets and coat collars turned up against the cold (fifty one degrees can feel mighty chilly to folks used to lowland Hawaiian temperatures), the miracle happened. The lead mist about us changed to silver then gold and vanished. The cold blue peak of Mauna Loa kindled with sunlight to glow like the molten lava which had made it, then turned to gray and yellow rock. It was worth our thirty-five mile trip from sealevel to this place four thousand feet above just to see the sun rise.

As the sunlight swept down the mountain and touched the treetops we heard our first bird notes, the signal for us to begin. They were mynah notes this time, and a small flock made a pretty pattern of black, white and brown as they flew to breakfast at a neighboring farmyard. The past two years the first notes heard had been a Plover's. We missed the Plover. Had some hunter in the lowland bagged him before the present year-long closed season? Here in Hawaii National Park, of course, all hunting is and has been "kapu" (forbidden).

We turned from the open country into the Kipuka itself. Kipuka Puauulu (Island of Flourishing-Flowers) was once a volcanic peak of fair dimensions, but it died so long ago it has been almost buried by the lavas of adjacent Kilauea (Rising-Cloud) and Mauna Loa (Long Mountain). The ash and tuff of the projecting mountain top have mellowed to a rich soil which supports a fine stand of virgin "mixed-forest", for the Kipuka stands between the wet and dry zones. Botanists who visit the Kipuka act as though they had found the Garden of Eden and have no time for birds. We wisely included no botanists in our party.

A male Elepaio (Hawaiian Flycatcher) whistled a cheery "aloha" to us from the young growth beneath the grand old trees. We peered into the shrubbery at the trailside for his mate in vain. The rules of the census are strict. Unless we see or hear a bird as an individual from the trail first we may not leave the trail for a better look nor deliberately flush it from the bushes. This year Mrs. Elepaio was not counted.

Overhead the trees were alive with flutterings and soft twitterings. We could see tiny forms etched against the sky and moving swiftly through the foliage, but shapes and call notes for most Drepanids are much alike. Until light touched their plumage or they burst into song, we could not count these, either. Two flew from a tall ohia tree, then three more, the sunlight turning their bodies crimson. We charted five Apapane (ah-pah-pah'-nay) in imitation of their song. Most native



Hawaiian bird names are phonic renderings of the birds' songs or calls.). Were all these Apapanes? A sweet trill was cut short by a loud "chee-onk" from a neighboring tree. Charted, two Amakihi (Ah-mah-kee'-hee). The rest had flown on.

More moved in as we proceeded down the wide trail, which we could chart. Part were identified by song, part by glimpses of their flashing colors, and part by their flight patterns - the short sprint from tree to tree of the green and yellow Amakihi, the higher, slower, undulating flight and black and white underplumage of the Apapane, the steep zoon upwards, quick down-swoop of the Iiwi (ee-ee'-vee), the steady wing-beat and long downglide of the Mynah.

A flock of brown California House-finches fluttered out of the giant Manele (soap-berry) trees. Why should Finches like manele trees and Drepanids tend to shun them? Why should so few male Finches in Hawaii grow red feathers? The Elepaio among the branches were not troubled by these questions, but tails up and wings drooped, divided their attention between the insects of the branches and the humans below.

A Japanese Pheasant whirred hastily away from a clump of grass by the trail-side. Mynahs, who had gathered in a dead tree where we could count them easily, and they watch us easily, cawed derisively. A scarlet Iiwi glimpsed us from a feathery-leaved Mamani (Hawaiian locust) tree and boldly came near. Was it anger or excitement which made him cry out harshly at us? He let us come within a few feet of him to wonder how a bird which is not a humming bird could be so like one. Indeed, how many centuries has it taken the Drepanid family to produce humming-like forms, finch-like forms, parrot-beaked ones, cross-billed ones, a nuthatch-like one, and a near-woodpecker?

We looked carefully into the lofty tops of the Koa (Hawaiian acacia) trees and along their massive branches for some of these rarer birds. We heard strange notes sometimes to be sure. Greenish and yellowish forms flitted here and there but they passed too quickly to get in the vision field of the binoculars. So many Drepanid forms, especially females and young, are greenish and yellowish, we had to let them go unidentified and uncharted. Even the common Amakihi we were not always sure of, for not all Amakihi act alike and look alike. Better scientists than we have been puzzled by their variations.

We even found an Apapane in the brown juvenile dress. Young birds in December? The meagre scientific records of Drepanids make no mention of a fall breeding season, but several species of introduced birds are known to breed in the fall. This year the summer and fall have been especially mild. Is this the key to the apparent increase in Drepanids this year?

A clucking and scolding in the underbrush drew our attention there. We could not see them, though but a few feet away, but counted six by ear. Then like blown leaves the flock of Liothrix shirled out of the brush into a dying and hence nearly bare, Naio (false sandalwood) tree. There were nineteen of them, the gay little immigrants who have taken Hawaii by storm. Thousands of the descendants of the original hundred pair liberated ten years ago winter in the lowlands.

To be concluded.

Robert I. Baldwin, secretary of the Hilo Manuiki Audubon Society, is caring for a young owl with a broken wing. Dr. Wipperman, of Hilo, set the wing, but Mr. Baldwin fears that the owl after being fed so long, will be unable to feed for itself. The Bird Park in Honolulu has expressed its willingness to take the bird if this proves to be the case.



## THE HAWAIIAN BIRD SURVEY OF 1935-37

by George C. Munro. Continued  
from last issue.

BIRD PROTECTION

(Editor's Note: The reader should understand that the migratory birds listed below are protected not only by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, whose provisions extend to the Territory, but are also protected, as are the non-migratory birds, by a year-long closed season imposed by the Board of Agriculture and Forestry, whose rulings have the force of law. However, the open seasons on these birds still remain on the statute books of the Territory, a seemingly illogical state of affairs, and occasionally lead to misapprehensions, as when a local magazine last year printed the open seasons on all birds as stated in the law, not as listed correctly in the booklet issued by the Board of Agriculture and Forestry.-- C.H.)

Bird lovers are combining to have the kolea removed from the list of game birds. To have it and others permanently protected and sanctuaries provided. If we can get protection and sanctuaries for the migratory birds and a banding system established, the study of these birds and stragglers will be much advanced. Sentiment alone should give the plover protection. It makes one of the most wonderful of bird migrations, from the Arctic in Alaska where it rears its young to the extreme south of the South Island of New Zealand. The American golden plover, of which the kolea is a variety, is under protection in the mainland states. The Eastern Golden Plover or Pacific Golden Plover, our Kolea, is protected by law in New Zealand. Why should such a bird that is invaluable to agriculture and grazing interests not be protected here?

Birds which I recommend for protection are:

The Hawaiian Crow, Alala (Corvus tropicus). A very interesting and harmless bird.

Hawaiian Hawk, Io (Buteo solitarius). Feeds principally on rats; also eats caterpillars and spiders. May at times attack poultry.

Short-eared owl, Pueo (Asio accipitrinus sandvicensis). Feeds mainly on mice. It increases quickly during mice invasions. Seldom attacks poultry.

Turnstone, Akekeke (Arenaria interpres interpres). Another wonderful migrant that goes as far south as New Zealand and has been found breeding as far north as Nova Zembla and Wrangell Island.

Pacific Golden Plover or Eastern Golden Plover, Kolea (Pluvialis dominica fulva). An invaluable bird for destroying insects and caterpillars.

Wandering Tattler, Ulili (Heterosculus incanus). Another very interesting bird whose nest in Alaska has very seldom been found. Migrates over the Pacific and straggles as far as New Zealand.

Sanderling, Hunakai (Crocethia alba). Anyone who has watched this little bird follow on the edge of a receding wave on the beach would feel a pride in it, and that it should get the best protection.

Bristle-thighed Curlew (Numenius tahitiensis), the Hawaiian Kioka. The sport in shooting this bird classes with shooting the plover over decoys from behind blinds. The birds are so easily killed that it can hardly be called sport.

Knudsen's Stilt, Aco or Kukuliaco (Himantopus himantopus knudseni). A very fine endemic bird which should not be allowed to become extinct or even rare.

Mudhen, Alae ula (Gallinula chloropus sanvicensis). A fine bird also in danger of becoming rare.

Black-crowned Night Heron, Aukuu (Nycticorax nycticorax hoactli). An adult bird in full plumage is a fine looking creature.

Spoonbill Duck, Kaloa Moha (Spatula clypeata). A remarkable duck. It used to come here in numbers, but it is now reduced to very small flocks.



Pintail Duck, Kaloa Moha (Anas acuta). This fine duck is also much reduced in number and we could well afford to protect those that still come.

White or Salmon-tailed Tropic Bird, Bos'n, Koae (Phaethon lepturus). An odd and beautiful bird. It often flies across an island and is then a tempting shot for a wandering sportsman. There is a skin in Bishop museum shot that way. I rescued the body and found in its neck a long narrow bill-fish folded in three lengths. The head and one bend which were in the stomach were partly digested. The rest of the fish was unaffected.

In my numerous pleas for protection for the birds I have generally stressed the economic part as most likely to receive attention. A great deal might be said for other aspects. Scientific research is of great value. Seemingly trivial discoveries sometimes point to others of great value, to human welfare. I think any gain to scientific knowledge is a gain to the civilized world. Any loss to it is a loss to humanity.

No one questions the call of the aesthetic in the singing and graceful, finely colored birds. But few think of the pleasure of seeing large flocks of wild birds on the water or on the wing. Protection of our shore birds would bring this within our reach. Sentiment also should be open to appeal. Who of old-time residents does not feel a pleasure in the call of the Chinese dove or even the cry of the mynah, or the first calls of the Kolea on its return? Who of these but would be glad to see the old-time shore birds become numerous again? We cannot do much for the forest birds, but we can still make these a joy to us. And we wonder that all these years we have allowed the bird that is most valuable to the interests that are the basis of our prosperity to be ruthlessly shot in the name of sport. I have never seen the kolea shot over decoys, but I once shot rock pigeons as they came in to drink at a water tank. It was not sport. We have imported toads to do the work these birds might have done. Toads cannot appeal to our aesthetic tastes or sentimental feelings. They are in some ways harmful, and probably cannot do the work as well as the kolea that does no harm.

Our Delegate to Congress is giving every aid to the cause, and since writing the above has brought to notice that in the House of Representatives, December 21, 1937, Mr. Iglesias introduced a bill "To extend the provisions of the Act to aid the States in wild-life restoration projects...to the District of Columbia or any Territory or possession of the United States."

The sad part of it is that the swarm of birds that originally filled the forests and kept the injurious-to-forest insects in check are gone. These birds were perfectly harmless to agriculture or any of the pursuits of man. Their places will now be filled by imported birds, most of them in some way harmful to industry. The Chinese thrush and cardinal have both been charged with doing some damage. The little white-eye will spread the Christmas berry tree (Schinus terebinthifolius) over the country and it may become as bad a weed as lantana, which the mynah was so abused for spreading. This is not intended as a condemnation of any of these birds. Their usefulness may greatly exceed their harmfulness, as is true of the mynah. The work that the kolea might have done without doing a vestige of damage to any work of man cannot be done by the toad on the large open pastures. The Kolea has been shot down unmercifully by sportsmen who decoy it within gunshot of blinds behind which they hide. It is not given even a sporting chance, which is hardly fair sport. The flocks have thereby been terribly reduced.

These things have been done and cannot be recalled, but we can do something to remedy the errors before it is too late. If we can protect the kolea and set inquiries going to find out if it is safe on its journeys north and south and whilst in Alaska rearing its young. We can protect what birds are left unprotected and make sanctuaries for them where no shooting at all is allowed. We can encourage a



sentiment for the protection of birds. This in fact is now making good progress. The introduction of new birds by the Hui Manu is now helping this. More and more people are receiving pleasure from feeding wild birds and encouraging them to be unafraid of humans. Junior Audubon Clubs have been formed in Hilo and it seems likely that this movement will spread.

LORIN GILL writes to Miss Hatch, "...in Des Moines ...I made the acquaintance of several Bob-White, Starlings and Red-Winged Blackbirds. I was walking through a field on the outskirts of Des Moines, when I accidentally flushed a Bob-White. I felt rather pleased that I was able to recognize its call - and mimic it successfully. The red-winged blackbirds, which I ran across in Glendale Cemetery, behaved in a rather peculiar manner. Unlike the starlings, which would merely sit and cackle, the blackbirds would swoop down on me from all sides, cawing - or whatever sound they did make - incessantly. They followed me from tree to tree, or rather, they flew from tree to tree while I walked on the ground, flashing back and forth over my head as though they wanted to show me something - and they did! Every time I would stop to look at them, several of the closest would alight on some branch, conspicuously in my view, and spread their wings, showing to the utmost the very little color they were blessed with. Their vanity was almost ludicrous.

"...Really, the only birds we got a chance to study in this part of the country (New York), were those at the Bronx Zoo. The outdoor "collection" was much inferior to Kapiolani Park, but those which they had in the "Jewel Box" were quite something else. They had the scarlet and the gold cocks-of-the-rock, quetzals, umbrella birds, a snow-white mynah with blue instead of yellow around his eyes, and with a plume like an egret's, numerous humming-birds, common mynahs like ours, hill mynahs, indigo sugar birds with buff wings, and red, black, and gold calistes from northern South America, and of all things, a Japanese hill-robin!

"...One day when we were about to enter the Metropolitan Museum of Art, we noticed, directly across the street, the headquarters of the National Audubon Society. You can imagine how we felt when we saw the picture of our house Mr. Cogswell had taken. The gentleman who took us in hand seemed to have no difficulty in recalling your name, and he was very much interested in Miss Peppin's colored films - I think he would like to add them to the Society's library."

AUGUST BIRDWALK. Sunday, August 11, found 17 members and guests enjoying a day on Poamoho trail. Weather was so exceptional that no rain fell, although this trail threads its way through several miles of tropical rainforest.

A score or more of friendly Elepaio, often with tails cocked jauntily over backs, were scattered at frequent intervals along the path. Another native Hawaiian bird often seen and heard was the Amakihi; identified by gently curved bill, olive-green back and yellow underparts. The most abundant species of the forest was the similarly colored, but smaller, white-eye, easily recognized by the circlet of white feathers around the eye.

Melodious whistles of Japanese Hill Robins were very frequent from the lush mountain sides below the trail. Several of these shy songsters were seen; pink bills proved to be the best field marks, but the yellowish throats and orange breast marks of adult males were also noted. The bird highlight of the day for many people, however, was the brilliantly-hued Apapane. A favorite setting for this scarlet, white and black bird was the red-flowered tops of the abundant Ohia Lehua trees.

The wealth of tropical rain forest plant life; thimble-berries eaten to repletion; superb scenery climaxed by the wide expanse of mountains, valleys, ocean, sky and clouds from the crest of the trail high above Punaluu, where the wind roared strong enough to blow one down: - these were the thrills to compensate for the fatigue of those who had walked too far by day's end. Motoring down through the pineapple Plantations to Wahiawa and home, one had the feeling of returning from a visit to an eerie, delightful world. - John S. Webb.



BIRD NOTES: JOHN WEBB REPORTS: White-tailed Tropic Bird: Three seen circling above Sacred Falls on July 27, at intervals during a 4 hour period. August 8, six noted at same place. Do they nest somewhere on the precipitous sides of the upper canyon? (Editor watched one circle above Manoa Uka on the Tantalus side for nearly half an hour on August 10 - have they been seen farther up the valley, or does anyone know where or if they nest in Manoa?)

COMMODORE GORDON ROWE writes from Seattle: "Just about a month ago I turned the command of Midway Island over to Captain R. W. D. Woods and have returned to my home in Seattle awaiting retirement. I'm sure I have left the birds in good hands ...I did not finish the banding as I had about 100 bands left that I wanted to put on the most vigorous gooney chicks at the last minute. I did band the albino chick and asked the 14th N.D. Public Relations officer to give the existence of the bird wide publicity so no nitwit might shoot it if it came near a steamer. It was fairly docile. I sent Mr. Munro a picture of it.

"I became very attached to the birds on Midway and probably made myself somewhat unpopular in my efforts to protect them. It fell to my lot to do something about the dogs. I destroyed about two-thirds of them. They all ought to be removed from the island as every so often a couple go berserk and kill a score or so of gooneys. All wires, etc., should be put under ground and as the vegetation increases, small landing strips left for the gooneys. Of course their greatest enemy is man, but I have hopes that with the future the type that would deliberately kill a gooney will not be found in the navy.

"Incidentally I monthly checked up - from the air - on conditions on Kure' and Pearl and Hermes. Once or twice on Laysan and Lisianski; all appeared all right except birds seem less plentiful on Kure'. When and if they get plenty of 1080 rat poison, I suggest dropping several hundred pounds of rat-food poisoned, and try to eradicate the rats. I had apparently scored a decisive victory over the beasts on Eastern and was doing fairly well on Sand Island.

"On the advanced bases such as Midway, the birds are a real morale factor. The gooney on Midway is in particular a great help in this regard.

"Again, please accept my resignation from the Society. With every best wish. (signed) Gordon Rowe, Commodore, U. S. Navy. P.S. I turned the banding over to Lieutenant Moffett, the air-sec reserve officer. G.R..."

CORRECTION NOTE: The August issue, by a typographical error, was numbered Vol. 7, No. 8. This should have read Vol. 7, No. 2.

#### OCTOBER ACTIVITIES:

Bird Walk. October 13, to Kaelepulu Pond. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 8:30 A. M. Shore birds are coming in now in numbers, so we should have a goodly count. If time permits we will drive on to Kahuku.

Meeting: October 21, Monday, at 7:30 P. M., at the Library of Hawaii. Mr. Thomas L. McGuire will talk on the Kilauea area of Hawaii, from which he had just returned. (Mr. McGuire was unable to be with us for the September meeting, as previously announced.)

#### HAWAII AUDUBON SOCIETY.

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