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A CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS IN HAWAII

By Helen Shiras Baldwin
(Continued from October)

We had finished the mile long trail through the Kipuka and left it regretfully. The twitterings and chirpings faded into the distance as the feminine half of our party trudged over the more recent lava and its scrubby growth which encircled the Kipuka. The male half repaired with the autos to the Military Camp for a look around. Pukeawe (Hawaiian heather) berries brightened the knee-high brush. The taller aalii shrubs were heavy with winged fruit. Compositae seeds floated by on white parachutes. There were insects aplenty, too, but no birds except a few finches and an occasional Amakihi. The banquet was spread but where were the guests? Indirectly or directly man had destroyed them or driven them away. How long must we wait for new forms to develop to fill the old places, or will impatient man gather ready-made ones from the far corners of the world?

These thoughts made us a little sad and we were glad to cross into the pasture optimistically called "Volcano Golf Course", and listen to the soaring English Skylarks. The Boy Scout who unofficially joined us and who listened to the Skylarks for the first time was disappointed and claimed that the Thrushes in the lowlands sing better. We agreed but reminded him that Shelley never heard the Spectacled Thrush. More Finches and Mynahs were here, a solitary Dove, a very few Plover, where there might have been hundreds, two turnstones in an adjoining plowed field where two score might have picked up a good living with profit to the farmer.

We turned back into the ohia scrub again. Why include this all but birdless region? It is typical country, for there are thousands of acres of it in Hawaii. In a land where perpetual change is the order of the day it may some day become alive with song and feathers.

The waiting autos took us to the east brink of Kilauea Iki (Little Kilauea) Crater, a subordinate crater to world famous Kilauea and small by comparison only. It was good to be in the lushness of the rain-forest, miraculously without rain. The tall ohia trees were red with bloom and full of the nectar loving Apapane and Amakihi and even a few of the rarer Iiwi. How could we chart them all - catch the split seconds when sunlight turned gray birds into vivid red, green, or yellow, or catch individual bird notes? We did our best but the human eye is not quick enough, and the crude human ear seems to be unable to distinguish the individual sources of more than four or six identical sounds given simultaneously. The tree-ferns, under-ferns and vines were so dense that a man could have stood erect a few feet on either side of the trail and we not seen him. Why try to census this all but impossible rain-forest at all? It is typical. It lies in a wide band like a thick garment about the windward slopes of Hawaii's mountains. In blossom-time it harbors native birds by the thousands.

The variety of chirrings, gurglings, whistlings and trills helped us distinguish individuals, for if there are now few species of Drepanids their versatility helps compensate for the loss of others. The narrow swath the trail cut through the interlaced vines, shrubs and tree-ferns and the steep slope of the Crater.

A new note brought us to a sudden stop. For the next half hour we tried but failed to glimpse "his shyness" or hear him sing as he preceded us down the trail. Several times he could not have been more than a few yards away. But we have seen him other times and two of our party knew him well. No other bird in Hawaii has a call-note like that of the Omao (Hawaii Thrush).

The "enigma" called near us, too, as at other times in this crater, but as usual hid himself or herself. Our efforts to bring him to call brought only a scolding male Iiwi down near us while the "enigma" still trilled near by. It was a Drepanid note but made by which Drepanid? The "enigma" still flits and calls unidentified and uncharted through the rain-forest. Some day we will catch up with him. (A later note from Mrs. Baldwin shows that this proved to be an accoustical reinforcement of the Apapane's song.)

We stopped out in the hot sunlight of the crater floor, a waste of recent lava thinly scattered with bushes and courageous young trees. No birds here today, but the forested walls echoed with their songs and showed flashes of them in flight. Sometimes one sees Plover in Kilauea Iki or Hawks or an Owl and in summer the snowy Koae (White-Tailed Tropic-Bird). But we saw none of these and slowly climbed the eight hundred foot western side of the Crater.

It was drier here. "Uluhe Country", of which there are thousands of acres in Hawaii, for as lava scrub grows older this is what grows there. The proportion of Amakihi and Elepaio to Apapane was higher here. Once we heard another of the rare Omao. Twice we thought we saw nests, but who can be sure through the dense snarl of uluhe vine-ferns?

Along the rim of the Crater the country changed gradually back to rain-forest, wet even on a dry day, lush and beautiful. Nearly all birds but the over-singing Apapane were silent now. We were soon back to our cars, hot, thirsty and hungry, but content. Our precious notes which we compared and checked over may lack scientific value but they were fun to take. Perhaps our most important achievement was to win the unsolicited comment of our Boy Scout guest:

"Gee! I didn't know you could have so much fun just looking at birds."

Anyway, we will all be back, the Boy Scout included, for next year's census.

SEPTEMBER BIRD WALK.

Sunday, September 14th saw twelve members of the Hawaii Audubon Society start off on a hike to Palchua in the Waianae mountains. However, the hike turned out to be a drive, for due to the industry of the armed forces, a road now leads all the way up to the ridge to which we used to hike.

At the top the party separated. Some stayed there on the ridge where the view over Waianae and surrounding country was fine. Others walked along the ridge; this group saw a few elepaio, and thought they heard an amakihi. A few land shells were spotted and gathered by one interested member.

Then the rain began, and as it showed no promise of stopping within the next twelve hours, we decided enough was enough, and came down from our high place, with a very poor haul of birds to our credit.

NOTES ON THE BLACK-FOOTED AND LAYSAN ALBATROSSES

By George C. Munro

During the last few months there has been mention in the local Press of news concerning the Black-footed and Laysan Albatrosses. The first was of a blackfooted albatross (Diomedea nigripes) coming ashore on the island of Oahu. This bird was found by William Albee Jr. on April 11, 1946, on the beach at Kailua. It had landed heavily, scoring a furrow in the sand and was sitting a few feet from the spot when discovered. Young Albee took it home and handled it carefully but it died next day. He agreed to present the specimen to the Bishop Museum if I would prepare and preserve the skin.

I made a careful examination of the body. Judging from all evidence I would say it was a young bird, probably of last season's brood and not breeding this season. It was extremely thin but in good feather, though the plumage seemed to be changing. Its total length was 33 inches, wing-spread 6 feet 10 inches, bill 5 inches, tail 7, tibae $3\frac{1}{2}$, wing to first flexure 1 foot 8 inches. Slightly gray across the face, below and back of eye, under tail coverts white below and streaky brown on surface, very little white showing on upper tail coverts. Its liver was slightly discolored but its lungs were in perfect condition. The stomach contained two small cuttle fish bills and was coated inside with a black liquid which almost filled the intestines and dripped from its bill. This may have been the ink of the cuttle fish but I never saw so much in any of the specimens which I have previously handled. The odor from the insides was very penetrating. There were no bruises on the body and I could see no evidence indicating the cause of its death, though it evidently came ashore to die. This is the first instance I have known of this species landing on Oahu.

Some sea birds habitually seek the shore when they sense approaching death. I have known several cases of the red-footed booby coming ashore on Oahu to die when their feathers had become matted with oil. This is the only species I have seen so affected. One wonders if something attracts this bird causing it to dive into patches of oil floating on the surface of the water.

The other was a report of a pure albino Laysan albatross chick (Diomedea immutabilis) which was thriving on Eastern Island of the Midway Group. It was sent by Commodore Gordon Rowe to the Public Information Office, 14th Naval District, Pearl Harbor, June 13, 1946, and given by it to the Press. The idea was to make it public and known that the bird was under observation and protection and less likely to be molested. Commodore Gordon Rowe had previously kindly furnished me with photographs of this interesting bird. It was banded and it is hoped that it will mature safely and be reported again in the future.

I had recorded in "Birds of Hawaii" another instance of a pure albino of this species seen by Captain Cook on Laysan Island in the 1880s. I did not see the bird myself but was told of it by the Captain. Captain Cook was one of the picturesque old sea Captains who frequented the Honolulu waterfront in the early 1890s. He claimed that it was information given by him that caused the Honolulu Fertilizer Company to start operations on the guano deposits on Laysan. One day in June 1891 there was an interesting assortment of these Old Salts ashore at Laysan: Captains George Freeth, F. D. Walker, Berry and Cook; besides an officer of the Japanese Navy who had taken the highest examinations his country afforded and was travelling to gain experience. He was one of the crew of the "Mary Foster" which was carrying guano to Honolulu.

It is gratifying to have in the "Elepaio" the fine and accurate account given by Mrs. Moir of the dance by the pair of Laysan albatrosses on Kauai. This is what we want from all the islands, records of any unusual actions or appearance of birds. It is hoped that this pair will start a breeding colony on the sandhills at Koloa, evidently an old nesting place of this species.

BIRDS ON MOLOKAI by Manning Richards

I am writing this account of the birds I saw on Molokai because I think some of you Elepaio readers might be interested in the bird life on that island.

As I stepped off the plane I noticed a pueo, or Hawaiian owl, flying over the airport. I watched him for a few minutes, and after circling for a few minutes he landed on what was evidently a nest, for he made several trips. I didn't bother him. On the way up to Puu Koloa, where I stayed, I saw only six more birds, all of them owls! I didn't see my first dove until two days later. It was a barred dove.

As far as I know, there is very little imported bird life on Molokai. Even the familiar mynah bird and English sparrow weren't present. However, in the heights of the East End mountains (4967 feet, highest elevation, compared to Mount Kaala's 4100 feet) I saw what looked like an amakihi, but which may have been the Molokai Akepa. I didn't go on any hikes with bird hunting in mind, but the silence struck me as odd. All I could hear was cricket-chirping and rarely, the chirp of the small green bird I was unable to identify.

This lack of imported bird life probably means that a good deal of old Hawaiian bird life still exists in the remote parts of the island. If I ever go there again, I will make it a point to look for these birds.

The west end of Molokai is even more desolate. The only birds I saw there were boobies that nested in the rocky cliffs and offshore islands. That lack of birds had me pretty well baffled.

However, I've got the "Where-are-the-birds-on-Molokai" challenge in my blood, so next summer I'm really going "all out" for birds!

MR. DEAN AMADON writes from the American Museum of Natural History: ... The book of Delacour and Mayr on Philippine birds has finally appeared and as I feel that many there in Hawaii may be interested in it, you and the editor may be willing to insert the enclosed review in some future number of the Elepaio. I suppose that Macmillan will offer the book for sale through some of their Honolulu outlets.

"I am just back from a month and a half collecting and studying in Mexico, but hope to get back to work on the study of Hawaiian birds that I had under way. The Elepaio continues to arrive regularly and reminds me of the happy days I had in Hawaii..."

Mr. Amadon's review follows:

"BIRDS OF THE PHILIPPINES. By Jean Delacour and Ernst Mayr. with map and 64 line drawings. Macmillan Company. New York. 1946. \$3.75

"This volume in the Pacific World Series has been delayed by the paper shortage until most of the servicemen who might have used it in the field have returned. It will still find a wide audience among those interested in the remarkable bird life of the Philippines. The authors have called upon their experience in various parts of Asia and the Pacific islands and with the large collections of birds at their disposal to analyze the origin and relationships of Philippine birds and to determine which of them should be considered as races or varieties of wide ranging species. This aspect of their book, while of concern chiefly to the more serious student, has permitted a simple and coherent treatment that will permit the beginner to identify most of the birds encountered in the islands. Each species is described and the emphasis correctly placed first on recognition of the family to which a bird belongs to facilitate identification. The reviewer found it was comparatively easy to become acquainted with the commoner birds of the more open areas on Luzon or the pine forests of the Igorrote country, though without such an aid as the present handbook, he often did not know their names. The birds of the lofty giants of the jungle present greater difficulties as rain often prevents use of binoculars and land leeches cover the observer. Yet the bird lover visiting such Philippine rain forests will have unforgettable experiences: the unearthly clamor of the great hornbills echoing from some fog-shrouded mountain or the brilliant passing of a Crimson-backed Woodpecker through the somber aisles of the forest. As Delacour and Mayr emphasize, the Philippines present a challenge, both to the casual bird student who will often find that little has been recorded about the habits even of the commoner species or to the explorer or scientists who finds in some of the more inaccessible mountains of these islands one of the few remaining areas in the world where new species probably await discovery. The present excellent handbook should do much to stimulate a period of renewed appreciation and study of the birds of the Philippines."

NOVEMBER ACTIVITIES:

Bird walk, November 10, to Kipapa trail. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 8:30 A.M.

Meeting: November 18th, at 7:30 P.M., in the auditorium of the Library of Hawaii. Plans of the Christmas census will be discussed. Other programs to be announced later.

HAWAII AUDUBON SOCIETY: President, Mr. Bordon Pearsall, 322 Green street; Vice Presidents, Miss Grenville Hatch, 1548 Wilhelmina Rise, Mr. Francis Evans, 132A Royal Circle; Sec'y-Treas., Mrs. Blanche Anderson Pedley, 3770 Sierra Drive, Honolulu 17; Editor, The Elepaio, Miss Charlotta Hoskins, 3212 Loulu St., Honolulu 54, Hawaii.

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