

# THE ELEPAIO

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For the Better Protection  
of Wildlife in Hawaii

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## NOTES ON SOME KAUAI BIRDS

By George C. Munro

Mr. Gordon Pearsall's recent observations as recorded in the January 1947 "Elepaio" gives us hopes that two of the most lovely singers of our native Hawaiian birds may be saved and even induced to increase. They are the thrush, Amaui or Kamao of the Hawaiians (*Phaeornis obscura myadestina*) Stegner and the Oo-aa (*Acrulocercus braccatus*) (Cassin). I have mentioned several times that when the Rothschild bird collecting expedition, of which Mr. H. C. Palmer was chief, was camped at Halemanu, Kauai in April 1891, that the beautiful rich singing of these two birds flooded the woods and awakened us in the early mornings. They were better singers than any of their representatives on the other islands, unless the Molokai thrush which I did not hear. Their representatives on Oahu were already extinct as far as known in 1891 and those of the other islands have almost become so since.

The Rothschild expedition collected on Kauai from late in December 1890 to early in May 1891. Its members hunted in the forest above the Olokele Sugar Mill on the sides of a branch of the Hanapepe Canyon; at Kaholuamanu near Waialeale, the highest point on Kauai; at Halemanu above Mt. Puukepele by the present Kokee camps out to overlooking the Kalalau Valley and on the northeast side of the island from Hanalei to Hanakapeai. At all these places both species were common even to the outer edges of the forest.

After Palmer had packed up and left Kauai I remained behind for a short time and he wrote me to try to get a few more oos for some special purpose. I borrowed a gun and ammunition from Mr. Francis Gay and went up to our first hunting ground above Hanapepe Valley. Mr. Gay followed me later in the day as he wanted some specimens for Mr. Scott B. Wilson, writer of "Birds of the Sandwich Islands." Koa trees were flowering heavily and birds were numerous. I don't think the koa flowers have honey as I have examined them since and failed to find any in them. It may have been the insects attracted by the pollen in the flowers that brought the birds. Anyway my notes said that the koa trees were flowering and birds were plentiful. I mentioned in my notes that the oos were not very common but between us we secured 10 specimens so they could not have been rare. I prepared the skins the next day and Mr. Gay took but three of them. He told me afterwards that Mr. Wilson expressed satisfaction at the well prepared skins. This was of course gratifying to me as Mr. Wilson understood taxidermy work himself and I was a self-taught amateur. The oo certainly was not uncommon then. In 1894 I made two trips to Kaholuamanu on March 13 and May 20. On the first I noted that the oo was common and on the second that there were plenty of oos in the small valleys. In the first week of December 1898 I spent a few days there and found the oo not uncommon. From April 12 to May 4, 1900, Messrs William Alanson Bryan and Alvin Seale collected on Kauai for the Bishop Museum and spent some time at Kaholuamanu. They saw thrushes but did not mention the oo. I was around Kokee September 25 to 27, 1928 and saw only native bird, an iiwi. From 1926 to 1932 I made several trips into the Kauai forests collecting live specimens of some indigenous plants, principally lobelias, and found native birds extremely



scarce. I, however, omitted Kaholuamanu and Waialeale. There were no oos or thrushes to be seen or heard anywhere I went in the forests. I decided in 1931 that the only way to make a reliable survey of the native birds was to visit all accessible parts of an island in quick succession. This was necessary as the birds migrated following the flowering of the trees in different places and at different elevations. However I did not get around to doing this until 1936. On July 23, 1932, I saw a Kauai thrush about four miles into the forest from the Kokee camps near the Koaia River. It seemed very tame. I have never seen the Kauai oo alive since I discontinued my residence on the island in 1899, though I thought I heard one in 1932, the same day as I saw the thrush. I spent a couple of days, January 29 and 30, 1936, at Kaholuamanu and saw or heard a number of thrushes and watched one singing on a dead tree top. Mr. Walter Donaghho reported seeing several thrushes in 1936 and also an oo after my visit. Now in 1947 Mr. Pearsall reports two pairs of oos and several Kauai thrushes nearer to the Kokee camps and from the other birds he saw and reports of other persons it would seem that the native birds are increasing in the vicinity of Kokee. A good observer told me in May or June that she had recently seen many iiwis at Kokee. The weather in the early part of September when Mr. Pearsall was on Kauai is not cold enough to drive the birds to lower levels as happens in the winter months.

No stone should be left unturned to give these valuable birds every chance to repopulate the Kauai forests out to the Kokee camps and Pua-ka-pele. The fine roading there now gives opportunity for people to see them. Great care should be taken in introducing any domestic birds into that area. Imported birds bring diseases to the native birds which are not immunized to them. They may now becoming immunized to diseases brought previously, but new diseases may be brought in by newly imported birds which penetrate the forests. For this reason open country birds and not forest birds should be introduced. This is of course difficult as birds brought to a new environment often change their habits. It might therefore seem safer not to bring in new birds which might also compete injuriously with birds already established here and perhaps bring new diseases. The spectacular native birds should be given every chance to rehabilitate themselves.

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EXTRACT FROM LETTER RECEIVED FROM LESLIE BAYLOR; Freeport, Illinois. 6-6-47

"If you had been us this spring, you would have realized how much I appreciate your having introduced me to bird study. We just had a picnic watching the birds come back. Also the winter birds were more active as the weather changed for the better. Most all of the birds came back before the tree foliage started to fill out so we saw them better in the bare branches. I saw for the first time in my life birds that are common for these parts. Also, in going through the bird books I learned the names of common birds that I saw in other parts of the States when I was in service. As I say, we've really enjoyed watching the birds. When we go places in the car, we watch for them and often stop along the road for a good look at a meadow lark or bluebird. Here at the Lake (Lake Kegonsa, Wisconsin), it is a regular aviary. There are birds all over and lots of different kinds. We've really worked over the little bird guide book that you sent us, trying to identify new birds. Still have four birds to identify which aren't in the book, and it is the only one we have brought along up here, as the others are big and bulky. A pair of robins have a nest on our neighbor's garage, and wrens are building a nest in a house on our garage. The robins had young ones on Tuesday of this week. The wrens really do sing a lot in their courting. I got close enough yesterday (8 to 10 feet) to take some pictures of one of them. Then there is a red-headed woodpecker around here that is fairly tame. I can get about ten to fifteen feet from him before he flies to the next tree.

"I'll try to name some of the birds that I have watched. In Winter, there were bluejays, chickadees, sparrows and cardinals. Had a good close look at a male and female cardinal on Young's bird feeder by the window. Learned from your book the



difference between male and female sparrows. Sounds simple, but it was new to me. This Spring it has been robins (Old faithfuls), woodpeckers (red-headed, hairy and downy), also their cousin the flicker. Is it fair to count hawks and crows and starlings and blackbirds? There are some pretty marked hawks. Red-winged blackbirds, too; meadow larks and bluebirds, mentioned before. Last Fall I saw very closely a Colorado lark bunting. Baltimore orioles, rosebreasted grosbeaks, American goldfinches, juncos, song sparrows (last Fall), indigo buntings, swallows, cedar waxwings, warblers, but which kind beats us, catbirds, brown thrashers, house wrens, mentioned before, and I guess that is all that can be recalled for now. Hope the account makes sense....."

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THE EARLY BIRD  
By Lorin T. Gill

The seven year old leaped from his bed as the Tantalus Valley awoke to a new November day.

"Let's have papaia for breakfast!", he shouted as he dashed out into the dew-laden garden.

The child's small world was a-twitter with bird calls. From the coffee thicket came the crystal notes of a Chinese thrush; a tiny gray elepaio sounded from a kukui tree and a scarlet cardinal swayed precariously on a poinsettia stalk. The matutinal mourning of turtle doves began. He dashed along a path where pink begonia blossoms and Hawaiian orchids showered him with dew; he dove into his own special "jungle" where giant ape leaves, glittering with globes of water, crowded the towering ginger stalks as they flaunted their perfumed blossoms. Fascinated, he stopped to inspect a great green caterpillar as it crawled up a moonflower vine.

The curving path merged into a straight way between two long lines of papaia trees and the small boy scanned the high pendulous fruit clusters with practised eyes. He went to the grape arbor to get a long pole on which was fashioned a net. It was his for the taking - that particularly luscious orange fruit. He raised the pole. Then he noticed that a tiny green-feathered body was wedged in a neat hole in the coveted papaia; its tail flirted vigorously; it seemed to have no head. He watched while a small green bird about the size of a ricebird and with white circles around its eyes, emerged, gave a faint little chirp and flew away.

The fruit was finally brought to the ground. In its side was the neat round hole. Even the child knew that a hole in a papaia meant bugs. He could not have it for breakfast, but he brought it to the house just the same. Opened, it showed but a few scattered seeds, and surprisingly, no bugs of any kind.

"That little green bird," he shouted delightedly, "I saw him - he ate 'em all up!"

Of course the tiny Mejiro or "White Eye" should not be blamed. He attacked the papaia because it was over-ripe and the bugs had gotten there first.

White eye is a member of the Zosteropidae, a genus closely allied to the warblers, and he has a small sweet song at nesting time. He is about four and a half inches long; the top of his head, back, rump and closed wings are olive green; his throat is yellow and his breast and abdomen light brown and white. The wing feathers are dark, their outer edges olive; his eyes are encircled with rings of snow white feathers - hence the name. His bill is slender and very sharp and black.

This variety of a rather widely distributed Asiatic species is limited to Japan. It is an arboreal type which very rarely descends to the ground; it prefers hill jungles close to cultivation and feeds on insects of many kinds.

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## LETTER FROM RICHARD KLEEN:

"...Perhaps this letter is a little overdue, but I have been busy acclimating myself to civilian clothers again.

"We left Honolulu on or about the 26th and arrived at San Francisco on April Fool's day. The trip was really fine. I wasn't seasick one minute. For a person who gets sick riding on a ferry boat it was quite a surprise. Dick and I didn't see very many birds going across the ocean due to the absence of any binoculars. There were a few albatross, some red-footed boobys and noddy tern. But as we neared San Francisco we noted pelicans, cormorant, three species of gull, great blue heron, coot and three species of swallow - cliff, barn and rough-wing. We arrived at Camp Stoneman on the 2nd and were given the usual guarantee that we would be out in 72 hours. About 372 hours later we finally made it. Dick preceded me by two days and looked into the car situation. When I finally made it, he had looked up some friends, and one of them had a 1931, 7 passenger, 12 cylinder Cadillac that he would consider selling, the consideration was \$300.00. Everything is terrifically expensive in the West so the Cadillac was really pretty reasonable. We started our for home on the 17th after I bought a pair of 8x30 binoculars for \$50.00. Our first stop was Muir Woods for the Redwood Trees. Some of them were really massive but nothing compared to those we were to see a little later at Sequoia. On the way there we saw:

Brewer's blackbird	California jay
Linnet	Brown towhee
Red-shafted flicker	Hermit thrush
Western meadowlark	Western wood peewee
American pipit	Raven
White-crowned sparrow	Western grebe
Oregon towhee	Ruddy duck
California quail	Hudsonian curlew
Allen's hummingbird	Canvasback

"After Muir Woods, we pushed on towards Yosemite and then Sequoia. Saw the General Sherman redwood which is the largest living thing. I believe it. Most of the nights we slept in a hotel but toward the end when our money was running a little low, we slept in the car. It was plenty large enough but because of a little trouble we had with our battery (generator wasn't generating) we had to park on a hill every night and give the car a little push in the mornings. Lots of laughs though. Birds seen between Yosemite and Sequoia:

Chinese spotted dove	Bullock's oriole
Stellar's jay	Cassin's kingbird
White-throated swift	California shrike
California woodpecker	Ash-throated flycatcher
American three-toed woodpecker	Black phoebe
Townsend's warbler	White-headed woodpecker
Audubon's warbler	Oregon junco
California purple finch	Arkansas kingbird

"From Sequoia we hit just the opposite in terrain - the Mojave Desert. A side trip down to the Boulder (pardon me), Hoover Dam was interesting and then we headed up to Zion National Park in Utah. From Zion to Bryce Canyon and the highlight of the entire trip. Bryce Canyon is about 3 miles long and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles deep and from a bluff you look down on a regular fairyland of spires, their bases tinted with a deep rose, their tips glittering in brilliant frost-white. Beyond is a sheer cliff, banded with pink, coral and yellow. (The previous two sentences were copied from a post card. I can't do it justice!) It is beautiful. From Bryce we headed toward Grand Canyon and for me the biggest disappointment. Birds from Sequoia to Grand Canyon:

Green-backed goldfinch	Chestnut-backed chickadee
Western bluebird	Black-throated gray warbler
Western gnatcatcher	Mockingbird



Plain titmouse  
 Lesser snow goose  
 Mountain bluebird (The most  
 beautiful bird I've ever  
 seen.)  
 Vesper sparrow  
 Violet-green swallow

Say's phoebe  
 Pinion jay  
 Pygmy nuthatch  
 Red-tailed hawk  
 Grey vireo  
 Cassin's purple finch

"After Grand Canyon we saw the Painted Desert, Petrified Forest and then rode through Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey. The trip cost us \$300 each, counting cost of car and binoculars. We had lots of fun and it was worth the money. Birds seen from Grand Canyon to home:

Arizona scaled quail  
 Scissor tailed flycatcher  
 Upland plover  
 Dick cissel  
 Purple martin

Little blue heron  
 Orchard oriole  
 Red-headed woodpecker  
 Black vulture  
 Bobolink

"I've done quite a little birding now that I am home. The warblers were better this year than any that I can remember. Birds of interest:

Nashville warbler  
 Cooper's hawk (nesting)  
 Bluebird (nesting)  
 Screech owl (one in brown, one  
 in gray phase, nesting)  
 Blue-headed vireo  
 Golden-winged warbler  
 Cedar waxwing  
 Cliff swallow  
 Worm-eating warbler  
 Broad-winged hawk  
 Veery  
 Olive-back thrush

Gray-checked thrush  
 White-eye vireo  
 Blackburnian warbler  
 Rose-breasted grosbeak  
 Wilson's warbler  
 Tennessee warbler  
 Kentucky warbler  
 Lawrence hybrids (very rare)  
 Bay-breasted warbler  
 Red-breasted nuthatch (very late)  
 Laughing gull  
 Yellow-breasted chat

"Thrushes have come north in great numbers. Flycatcher were a little late as were vireos. Mourning dove is alarmingly scarce. Cowbirds another scarcity. Cuckoos, both species are up in great numbers. The linnets are breeding on Long Island for the first time in history. A friend was walking through Alley Pond State Park in September and came upon an Audubon's Corocara, a bird endemic to the southern part of Texas and Louisiana. It was strutting along in front of him like a chicken. Naturally his eyes almost turned inside out. After noting all field notes he telephoned the Museum of Natural History and in no time at all, ornithologists from all over the Island were converging on little old Alley Pond. Hundreds of them, following one poor little helpless bird. It must have been quite a sight. I would have given a lot to have seen it.

"I have registered at Rutgers and will start in June. It will be good to get back into the swing of things again. Rutgers is a lot more crowded than at any time I can remember....."

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FIELD NOTES: Area, Makiki, on Kewalo Street, one half block mauka of Wilder. The weather warm, with frequent showers. Time of year, April, 1947. On the morning of April 3, at about 6:30 a.m., I observed a small greenish bird, slightly larger than a white-eye sitting in the top of a dead tree at a height of about 25 feet. It was calling in short, explosive whistles, very much as the Kentucky cardinal does. I saw it in the same tree on three successive mornings, sometimes singing a beautiful



song, sometimes calling its "phit-phit-phit". On the fourth morning it flew from its customary perch into a papaia tree which is about four feet outside my living room window. I was then able to see it at a close range and identify it definitely as an Oahu creeper. It sat in the papaia tree for several minutes, and then flounced over into a Chinese banyan directly in front of my apartment where it busily searched for food on the branches. It is a bird of about 5 inches' length, and gaily colored. Its back and sides are olive green, the wings, brown with two light bars, the bill straight, and the breast, yellow.

This is the first Oahu creeper I have seen, although there must be some in the hills and mountains back of the city. Certainly it is unusual for this bird to be in the Makiki District for it is a forest bird belonging to the nectar eaters of the Drepanididae family.

It is interesting from a historical standpoint because evidently few have been observed in the years that bird observations have been made in the Islands. At least there have been few observations written down. According to Mr. Munro in his Birds of Hawaii<sup>1</sup>, the Oahu creeper was rather common in 1890, but by 1935 not a single specimen was reported as having been seen. Evidently this bird suffered the same treatment and fate that so many other endemic birds have suffered. Mr. Henshaw in his Birds of the Hawaiian Islands<sup>2</sup> mentions that "according to Wilson this species is fairly common in the district of Halemanu...Palmer found it not rare in the upland districts of Waialua from 1500 feet upward. Perkins found it also at Kawaialoa." According to J. d'Arcy Northwood<sup>3</sup> the Oahu creeper is the scarcest of the five forest perching birds likely to be seen on the island of Oahu.

1. Munro, G. C. Birds of Hawaii. Honolulu, 1944
2. Henshaw, H. W. Birds of the Hawaiian Islands. Honolulu, 1902
3. Northwood, J. d'A. Familiar Hawaiian Birds. Honolulu, 1940

Priscilla M. Griffey

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#### AUGUST ACTIVITIES:

BIRD WALK: August 10, to Kipapa. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 8:30 a.m.

MEETING: August 18, Monday evening, 7:30 p.m. in the Auditorium of the Library of Hawaii. Mr. George C. Munro will speak on Bird Banding.

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