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MOCKER, THE THRUSH By Helen Shiras Baldwin

To the ornithologist, he was just another specimen of *Trochaloptorum canorum*. To those who prefer their names in English, he was a Chinese thrush; or to those who favor Chinese nomenclature, hwa-mei. To the old Japanese gardener who grew flowers in a plot at the foot of the hill, he was "One brown bird, guava stop, sing like hell." But to our children and us, he was Mocker, a distinct personality and a member of the family.

I do not remember when we first met Mocker, for many birds came to our feeding place on the top of the cement retaining wall to the porte-cochere. But gradually we noticed that one thrush was bolder and more friendly than the rest. He would flit about the front porch and the family car, or fling unprintable epithets at the cat, or even perch on our old dog Pooch with delightful fearlessness. (Pooch was good to his bird visitors and seldom objected to their hopping about or even on him while he dozed - so long as they kept away from his face, ears and food dish. They might bathe in his drinking water, but the food dish was sacred.)

Mocker's left wing was slightly askew, though not enough to really hamper his flight, probably the result of some former escape or accident. This made him easy to spot, though soon we needed no such identification, for his mannerisms were easily recognized. One was a trick he had of watching us with one eye, then leaping about and viewing us with the other. He came to the feeding station directly, without the furtive circling and hesitating that characterized other thrushes.

But chiefly we knew him by his voice, for within the type songs of the species there are individual differences which can be learned with practice, just as the sound of one's own child at play or one's own dog barking. Mocker's voice was not as sweet as that of some other thrushes I have heard, but he sang with a full-throated abandon that was in keeping with his daring optimism.

He imitated other birds, too. No one taught him. He did it for fun. The notes of cardinals, mynahs, chickens, sparrows, linnets, the alarm cry of the hill-robins, even the conventional whistle with which we called Pooch when he was loose, were all in his repertoire. (So far as I know, Pooch was never really fooled by that whistle, though sometimes he paused for a moment while coming to us to make sure.)

Mocker seldom mimicked other sounds unless they, or something similar, were given first. When the cardinal flung out his whistled challenge from the tip of a giant bamboo behind the house, Mocker would whistle it back to him, in whole or in part, with thrush epithets thrown in. He seldom sang another's song without interpolating notes or phrases of his own. In short, he mocked them rather than mimicked them, and seemed to be continually poking fun at them. For example, he would sometimes caw back at the mynahs, especially when they were chattering excitedly. Usually the mynahs paid no heed, but occasionally one at the feeding station would answer and even throw back a thrush note or two at Mocker. Neither he nor the mynahs drove birds of other than their own species from the feeding station.

His most accurate imitations were those of chicken sounds. The typewriter's clicking would often stimulate him to cry out a lot of chicken talk to me as I typed by the open window and he teetered on the back of the porch not six feet away; but his most musical number, other than his ancestral songs, was his interpretation of our neighbor's roller canary. Our neighbor lived very near and kept the canary in a roomy cage on the front porch. As the canary sang a great deal, Mocker had plenty of practice. We all vowed that Mocker's singing was better than the canary's, but of course Mocker was one of us and we may have been prejudiced. Mocker's version was certainly much less monotonous than the canary's, for he mingled it with thrush phrases. His tone was richer and fuller, too, as befits a thrush.

Mocker was not the only thrush I have known to mimic other bird species. Slinky, who has a homestead among the guava bushes behind our chicken coop, would often mimic chickens and mynahs. He was such a sly, furtive fellow I had him branded as a coward, till one day he found himself trapped in the baby-chick pen. This one had a one-inch mesh except at the top. When I arrived on the scene, Slinky had all the chicks, who were all more than twice as large as he, herded in one corner, all the adult chickens in their pens hysterical with excitement, and himself vainly trying to struggle through the inch mesh. When I finally was able to catch Slinky, he put up a fight that would have done credit to an eagle, or a humming bird. But Mocker would not tolerate Slinky at the feeding station, though he seemed not to mind the presence of other thrushes, who presumably were females.

One morning we found Mocker perched on the tail light of our car and singing excitedly at his image in the freshly polished chassis. We determined that Mocker deserved a better idea of himself than that and put up a small standing mirror on the feeding place. He soon found it and went into a flurry of excitement, parading back and forth, fluffing out his feathers, shaking his wings like a fledgling begging for food, sometimes darting toward it and jabbing at it with his beak. But mostly he sang with an excited abandon that was almost distressing. This was the only time that I knew Mocker to give his imitations without first hearing the original or something resembling it. At these performances he would sing for ten minutes or more and give out everything he knew, all jumbled, in a tumult of sound such as I have never heard before or since from so small a creature. The result was not altogether pleasing. We debated about removing the mirror for Mocker's peace of mind, but the mirror had been spotted by other species of birds, too, and their reactions were so varied that we left it there while we watched them, but that is another story. In time, Mocker grew more accustomed to the mirror-bird, but as long as he lived, he would sing at it from time to time.

Mocker's sudden and untimely death saddened us all, especially as we were partly to blame. Our cat, who was nine years old, stiff with age, and too well fed to need to hunt, often slept on top of the car. For sometime he had done this without paying any heed to the birds on the feeding station a little distance away. Occasionally we had seen him try to sneak up on ricebirds feeding on the lawn, but he never seemed to take such pastimes seriously and we paid too little attention to his instincts and permitted him to continue his siestas atop the car.

But one morning, without warning of any kind, we saw the cat take the long flying leap to the feeding place, heard a single cry of terror and defiance, and rushed out, too late to save poor Mocker. We buried him deep and the children put flowers on his grave. We moved the feeding station as a precaution for other birds and for a time shut the cat in the house, till that seemed too cruel a treatment for the old puss who had merely followed an instinctive urge too deeply seated in his being to be eradicated.

It is easy to philosophize, and say that Mocker had already lived longer than many thrushes; that, thanks to us, his life was easier and richer than it would otherwise have been; that sooner or later some other cat or mongoose might have caught him,

or that predation is a quick easy way for wild things to die, and that it is much better than the lingering suffering of disease or the semi-starvation of old age among wild creatures.

Still, the feeding station in its new place never gave us the old carefree joy that the old one had. We never were on quite as intimate terms with any of its visitors, for Slinky, who now came quite often, never trusted us, and can you blame him? It is only in our hearts and memories that we hear the carefree joy, the fearless abandon, the heedless ecstasy of the singing of our little friend who lived "not wisely but too well."

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NOTES ON THE ISLANDS IN KANEOHE BAY By George C. Munro

This paper I wrote toward the end of 1936 for the "Elepaio", but the manuscript was misplaced and only recently recovered. I cannot find that it was published so now submit it with some additions to bring it up to date, hoping I will be excused if there are repetitions of former papers in it.

During my bird-banding work on the islands off Oahu before the war I had much trouble in finding a boatman to take me to islands in Kaneohe Bay. Alona at Waimanalo was available for Manana and Kaohikaipo and on occasion to Mokulua; Solo Mahoe for all the islands as far as Mokumanu. Others filled in at different times. But Kaneohe Bay was too far away to be handy for boats from Kailua. I searched Kaneohe and was rewarded by finding a fisherman named Thomas Tam. Tammass or Tam for short is Scotch for Thomas, but this man was a Chinese.

He started on June 27, 1936 to take me and my helper, Yama, to Kekepa, Kapapa and Mokulii, islands situated on the reef across the entrance to Kaneohe Bay. We had gone only a short distance when the connecting rod of the engine broke and he had to row back and land us again. He made repairs and we made another start on the 28th, with better luck though the weather was rougher. We soon reached the small mushroom shaped coral rock of Kekepa and landed on the narrow tidal shelf surrounding the island. The island, about 20 or 30 feet high is undermined all around by the action of the sea. The overhanging rim is about 10 feet above the tidal shelf or water at high tide. The only way to reach the top was by climbing a rope hanging over the rim. I did not feel equal to this and assisted Yama up. He made a quick round of the top and reported the vegetation as much the same as on other islands and no signs of birds.

When Mr. John F. G. Stokes was investigating the offshore islands some years ago for data on the native rat he saw what appeared to be evidence that birds had nested under the vegetation on this island. I had found the Christmas Island shearwater nesting on Mokumanu and I hoped it would also be nesting here. Mr. Stokes had visited the house of a native who was acquainted with the island but did not find him home. However, a young boy volunteered the information that a small bird inhabited the island. He said it could not fly but jumped. Here I thought was a probable remnant of the native Hawaiian rails. But Yama saw no trace of it nor did David Woodside, who has since visited the island. The sea was getting rough endangering the boat so I called Yama down. We boarded the boat and made for Kapapa. Tam was careful of his boat and anchored well out and we waded to the island. Campers had been using it and left it in a very disorderly condition.

A pair of Bulwer's petrel (Bulweria bulweri) were in a hole in the coral. We put bands on them and left them in the hole. Yama saw another out of reach in a deep hole in the coral. They were the only live birds we saw on the island at the time. A dead Bulweri was found on the east end of the island. There were also some desiccated bodies of akekeke (Arenaria interpres interpres). A pile of empty gunshot

shells seemed to tell of plover shooting in the recent past. The Pacific golden plover (*Pluvialis dominica fulva*) during the season, now roost on the rocks of the tidal shelf and can be heard at night there. It is, however, now protected. I have been told that sportsmen shoot the Chinese dove there when in a flight across the entrance of the bay from headland to headland. I have never seen evidence of such a flight and will be interested in watching for it. Shooting, of course, is now prohibited on the island. There were no signs of shearwaters nesting on the island but some scratching in one or two places on the surface indicated that they might have been investigating it for a nesting place.

We then proceeded to Mokulii and made a landing. A small colony of shearwaters had burrows in a patch of scaevola on the northeast side and we banded seven adults. A year or two after I found one of these banded birds on Popoia Island. It was one of the few returning birds found on an island different to where it had been banded. Most of the island was lantana covered and there have been other colonies amongst it. On a later visit I noted tracks in the grass leading to the lantana which would indicate that the birds had nests there.

With the ending of the war and easing of restrictions on civilians' boating in Kaneohe Bay, my people put their boats in the water again. On one of their fishing trips my grandson noticed a young bird in the down on Kapapa. He told me of it and on October 14, 1945 we went to the island and found a number of burrows in the scaevola, under ironwood trees, and young birds on the surface under large boulders on the east end of the island. A recently dead shearwater in the brown breasted phase of plumage was lying on a little sandbeach there. It was a beautiful specimen but too long dead to be pleasant to work on so I buried it in the sand. A chick in the down was lying by an old camp. Its head was singed as if it had been attracted by the embers of a deserted camp fire. I doubt that it was done maliciously as there were no other signs of what might be depredations. I talked to some Hawaiian campers on the desirability of protecting the birds and leaving camp sites clean and they promised to help. There was a young bird in nearly all the burrows examined and we banded seven.

On November 11, 1945, I was glad to accept an offer from Mr. C. E. Meyer to take me to Mokulii and we landed there dryshod. The coconut trees on the landward side had the appearance of having been used for gun practice, their tops being much shattered. A frame on the northwest side by the scaevola patch may have been a target and if so the missiles would strike right into where the shearwaters had their burrows. However, the colony seemed to be intact. There were some feathers at the entrance to one burrow which I did not examine closely and a dead adult shearwater on a sandy shoreside which showed no marks and from all appearances had died a natural death.

The scaevola was in unhealthy condition. I thought this was caused by drought but found afterwards that rats were eating away the top side of the horizontal young branches to get at the soft pith. The under side was not touched and the branches did not die, and even flowered, but looked unhealthy. The rats, evidently the vegetable feeding native rat, were also eating the green fruit of an imported passiflora. The dead shearwater was untouched by rats, a further indication that they were vegetarians. I had seen that with the Polynesian rat on Howland Island. There were dead birds around but the stomachs of specimens of rats taken contained only vegetable matter.

From there we went to Kapapa and made another easy landing. The beautiful fringe of scaevola on the northwest end was in great contrast to the scrubby patch on Mokulii. There are no rats on Kapapa. This island was, alas, later to be devastated by the tidal wave of April 1, 1946 and the exceptional high seas of January 1947. It will take many years for it to regain its condition of March 31, 1946.

The birds were undisturbed and we saw several we had banded on October 14. Campsites had been cleaned, whether by the armed forces, Board of Agriculture and

Forestry, or campers, could not be told. The whole island had had an overhaul since our last visit. It is most encouraging to see that the wedge-tailed shearwater which probably had just come to colonize Kapapa before the war had stayed with it. They had evidently raised their young yearly despite the dropping of bombs all over the island, and the scaevola where most of the burrows were located. When it is realized that these birds come to the nesting island at the end of March and the young do not leave till about the end of November, it will be seen how little the dropping of bombs on islands tenanted by burrowing birds affects these species.

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FIELD NOTES: "The 'short fluffed-out grayish-green bird with an orange-yellow spot on the forehead' mentioned in Chester Fennell's High Adventure (Elepaio, July 1947) may have been any one of several greenish species of birds which frequent the mamane flowers. I have often seen female iiwi and the older young so marked by the pollen from the flowers adhering to the plumage as the birds poked their bills into the blossoms. I believe the same may be true of other species.

"If the mamane flowers were not in bloom, but the trees in the green-bean stage, then the birds he saw were probably palila. These are small grayish birds with more or less yellow on the heads. These birds have heavy bills for cracking open the pods and seeds of the mamane. The palila follows the crop and is usually present in fair numbers in mamane groves when they are in the green-bean stage. The birds leave an area when the seeds are too hard and ripe or when the trees are in flower. As the mamane flowers at different times at different elevations or in accordance with variations of rainfall, no special time can be set for seeing the palila at any one place at any one time of year.

"The terns, mentioned by Grenville Hatch in the last Elepaio, nest at only certain places along the cliffs of this island (Hawaii). One of these is at Lapaohoe. Another is at McKenzie Park, or rather at a place a short distance from there where an old lava tube, its top broken in, opens out to sea. I have been told that the cliffs between Mahukona and Palolu Valley also have nesting places for terns, and that they have been found nesting along the sea in Hawaii National Park, also at South Point.

"The birds nest in natural openings in the lava, and apparently at some distance back from the edge of these openings, for no guano is conspicuous from the outside. The nest sites are found by watching the birds fly into these openings. At no place are they numerous."

Helen Shiras Baldwin

Bird Walk, September 14th, 1947. "A baker's dozen of us started off in three cars and a jeep the fair morning of the 14th. Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton had their new Studebaker sedan, for which they have waited long months. Our destination was the Kawailoa trail, about six miles mauka of Haleiwa. The army had a good surfaced road to the top of the hill. It went through a stretch of forest land, mostly eucalyptus, after going through the village of Kawailoa, then reached an expanse of fallow fields where wild orchids bloomed among the tall grasses. Looking back from the height where we left the cars was a superb view of the Waianae range and bay.

"Walking up the dirt jeep road, now much gullied by rains, we soon entered the trail, and the jeep road continued, very much up and down, but easy walking. Stag-horn fern, lehua, koa trees, predominated. There was one stand of several sandalwood trees and though they had some blight on them, they bore numerous blossoms. The naupaka shrub flourished, also some strawberry guava and numerous other shrubs and trees.

"The first bird noted were those of the ricebirds and hill robins. The latter were singing continuously throughout the area all day, and a number were seen. The

little elepaio called from the shrubbery. However, most of the time the woods were noticeably still, which was a disappointment to Miss Hatch, as she and Miss Kojima had visited the area several weeks ago and found the amakihi and apapane quite numerous. It was not until several of us had sat quietly for sometime overlooking the ravine filled with lush tropical growth that the bird calls came closer. Flocks of mejiros busied themselves in the koa branches, also several linnets. Miss Hatch and Mrs. Smith had the elation of hearing an approaching amakihi, then he flew to the blossoming lehua tree a few feet in front of them. His plumage was unusually brilliant and the close view with the glasses assured the watchers he was a perfect young, healthy specimen. Not long afterward, as we lunched, a curious little elepaio hopped from branch to branch above our heads. He did not scold, but just hovered over us. Four more amakihi, and five more elepaio were seen by this group.

"Most of the party had gone on ahead over the next rise and dip and a further steep climb, with Unoyo in the lead. They reported they saw and heard hill robins, saw ricebirds gathering nesting material, and Mrs. Porter had the satisfaction of sighting an apapane, four more amakihi and heard a Chinese thrush. Also saw a number of the two varieties of doves. Mr. Emerson wandered ahead of the party in his interest in exploring. Several went to find him to let him know we were starting back, as it was about two o'clock. The stragglers were rewarded by the delay, for just before they emerged from the trail, a little Japanese tit (*Parus varius varius temminck*) appeared very near and all witnessed the rare sight of him. His curious call, sounding to one observer like the hiss of escaping steam, called the attention of the group. He remained long enough that the group was able to study the markings closely. The white streak on the top of the black head, with the white cheeks, gives the effect of broad black and white stripes, which with the rosy shoulders and underparts, make the tit a very gay little bird.

"On the return trip to town, one car stopped at the Kalihi Flats, and found a flock of perhaps fifty turnstone, a number of plover, ten sanderling, eight wandering tattler, and twenty-four stilt. This count was the more pleasing, since the number of shore birds on the Flats has been greatly reduced since extensive filling has been done. Several observers reported that most of the plover are still in partial summer plumage. Adverse lighting conditions on the Flats made this somewhat hard to verify.

"It was generally conceded that the day had been one of our most successful walks for sometime. Kawaihoa seems to be booked on our regular schedule of trips from now on!"

Dorothea L. Taylor

Game Bird Survey. There are more than 300,000 wild doves, nearly 150,000 quails, and 70,000 pheasants at large in the islands, according to a game bird survey made during the last year by Charles W. Schwartz for the Territorial Board of Agriculture and Forestry. Mr. Schwartz made a detailed study which is being used as the foundation for improvements of the game bird populations of the islands. Mr. Schwartz reports: "...Improvement of populations will rest primarily upon improvement of the range rather than upon introduction of artificially reared game farm stock. Just as a cattle range has a definite carrying capacity, so does game bird range, and good game management will take cognizance of this principle by correcting limiting factors."

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OCTOBER ACTIVITIES:

BIRD WALK: October 12, to Kealepulu Pond. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 8:30

MEETING: October 20 at 7:30. Program to be announced.

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