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MORE KOREAN BIRD NOTES

Chester Fennell

(Editor's note: Mr. Fennell has generously written to Grenville Hatch: "Always feel free to use any portions of letters I may send for Elepaio material if you find them suitable. I shall attempt to keep you informed of my bird observations and experiences as regularly as possible. News may be a little scarce during the winter season, but hoomanawanui.")

"...A light mantle of snow covered the ground and rooftops when we awoke this morning and persisted throughout the day adding not a little to the general holiday spirit.

"Went for a stroll up through the pine woods, which thickly clad the southern slopes of Nam San (South Mountain), a 760 foot hill directly in back of my billet. I always have hopes of finding the Japanese kinglet (*regulus regulus japonensis*) or at least one of the sixteen different species of woodpeckers that have been reported from Korea, in this wooded section, but to date Old Dame Fortune has failed to smile upon my efforts. The *shujukara* or Japanese great tit, with which the kinglet is reported to associate, is fairly common all around Seoul just now and strongly resembles the black-capped chickadee of the eastern U.S., both in actions and colorpattern. I have also seen several in cages around town.

"Also saw a flock of some fifteen turtle doves (*streptopelia orientalis orientalis*) this afternoon. They were all on the ground, presumably feeding on weed seeds, and flushed with a whistling whirr into the nearby treetops as I approached. They are large and fat at this time of the year and not particularly shy. A broad white terminal band on the tail is an unmistakable field mark and especially prominent as the bird breaks into flight. The blue hill pigeon (*columba rupestris rupestris*) is the only other species with which the turtle dove may be confused; however, a conspicuous white rump and a sub-terminal tail band plus a much faster, more direct flight, readily serve to distinguish the hill pigeon. Two weeks ago today, a couple of friends and I were eating our lunch in the shelter of a rock on the summit of a precipitous three thousand foot peak some ten miles northeast of Seoul, when a pair of these pigeons rushed directly over us with a whish of wings that caused us to duck our heads involuntarily. I don't believe they could have been more than three feet above us. They had approached from the rear and obviously hadn't seen us because of the sheltering rock. They swiftly sped into the valley before us and merged with a flock of twelve more, which was proceeding up the valley at right angles. The entire group circled the huge amphitheatre several times then finally shot up over the granite ridge and disappeared from sight. I had breathlessly followed them the whole time with my field glasses and obtained some excellent views as they turned and wheeled below us. They are remarkably fast and streamlined and struck me as

being about the most rapid avian flier I have yet observed. Perhaps this was only an illusion accented by our remote and precarious position on the peak but I don't believe it could have been entirely due to that fact.

"Have recently purchased a new traveling companion--a male, yellow-throated bunting (*emberiza elegans elegans*) or miyama-hohojiro, to mention his Japanese cognomen. At the present time I'm calling him "Miyama" but daily threaten to call him "Forever Ember" if he doesn't start to sing soon. Daniel James Cummings in his Notes on Korean Birds - five copies of which I'm sending under separate cover...-says 'it has the finest song of the buntings,' but apparently the little rascal is entirely ignorant of that ecomium. Fearing that he might be, I even went so far as to take the book close to his cage, carefully read the passage to him and showed it to him in black and white. However, he only raised his black crest suspiciously and silently gave me the eye. I guess he doesn't comprehend English any better than a lot of my other little Korean friends. O well, another six weeks of Korean language night classes and I'll be able to translate it for him into his native tongue. (Have often wondered if splitting my tongue would help me master the pronunciation any more easily.) Of course, his reluctance to sing may rest wholly upon our current frigid temperatures. For the last two weeks our nocturnal recordings have been ranging between two and ten degrees Fahrenheit. Daytime readings never rise above freezing and are generally far below. Probably with the advent of spring, sunny skies and warmer breezes, Miyama will burst forth into melodic trills and arias more in keeping with the renowned reputation of his ancestry. On the other hand his refusal to vocalize may be the result of sheer humiliation experienced upon the ignoble, soul-crushing loss of all but two straggly members of his caudal appendage. I had only had him one short day when our over-zealous, eager-beaver Korean maid, Kim Chop Soo, decided to clean his cage. Need I say more? Miyama's quarters were spic and span when I returned from the office that evening, both fore and aft - but particularly aft!

"Yellow-throated buntings are apparently favorite cage birds among the Koreans, for I have seen many of this species in the little bird and flower shops throughout the city along with the greenfinch (*chloris sinica ussuriensis*), Japanese skylark (*alauda arvensis japonica*), Korean suthors (*suthora webbianafulvicauda*), varied titmouse or yamagara (*parus varius varius*), the afore-mentioned Japanese great tit (*parus major takahashii*), black-naped oriole (*oriolus chinensis diffusus*) and the Oriental bullfinch (*pyrrhula pyrrhula griseiventris*). If I ever get into a billet where I could have a room all to myself, I would like to procure at least one of each species to keep and observe at close range. As it is, I'm afraid my present room mates may object to my turning the room into a more extensive aviary. For sheer amusement, I occasionally threaten to bring home a crane. You should hear the loud wails and moans of despair which that occasions!

"Probably the highlight of all my Korean experiences to date was the meeting of Dr. Horace Underwood, president of the Chosen Christian College and the leading authority on all phases of Korea, especially in the historical and cultural fields. He presented an illustrated lecture on a trip to the summit of Paik-tu-san, the highest peak in Korea (9002 ft.), which lies directly on the Korean-Manchurian border. He accomplished the ascent in the latter part of July, 1931, with his wife, three sons, a Dr. Block and Korean guides. The peak is actually a large dormant crater and contains a large body of water whose surface lies some 1800 feet below the rim of the crater. The Koreans call this lake Chunggi or Lake of Heaven. Dr. Underwood attempted to measure its depth

from a folding boat which they had packed in with them, but much to their regret the only plumbline they had with them, 1490 feet long, failed to touch the bottom. All he can say is that it is deeper than 1490 feet. Their route of approach lay along the valley of the Yalu river, a heavily forested, marshy area teeming with brilliantly colored wildflowers and nesting ducks and geese. Unfortunately, Dr. Underwood is neither a botanist nor an ornithologist, so is unable to name the species they encountered. Many times during the course of his talk, he expressed his deep regret that authorities in these two fields were not among his party. However, he did stress the mass of yellow-flowered rhododendrons, which they found in glorious display around the shores of the lake within the crater. Two individuals of this rare species are said to be presently growing in the Palace grounds here in Seoul. I must locate them and watch for their flowering next spring.

"After the presentation of this highly inspiring bit of entertainment, some thirty or more interested members of the audience remained to reorganize the Korean Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. This organization was originally founded in 1900 and has accomplished a great deal in the line of study, research and preservation of all things Korean, especially in the fields of science, music, drama, folklore, customs, dress, etc. Some sixty-two papers have been prepared and published within that period. Cummings' Notes on Korean Birds is one of them. Needless to say, at the outbreak of World War II the organization was forced to abandon all activity and only now is being reactivated. Dr. Underwood, who was the group's last president, was again elected to the same position. He has a very dynamic personality and literally sweeps everyone along with his intense enthusiasm and exuberance. Of course I became a member on the spot and only hope I also may be able some day to contribute something of worthiness to the field of Korean ornithology.

"The National Science Museum here in Seoul has a fairly extensive, good collection of mounted specimens, which has helped me considerably in the identification of many species and given me an idea of what to expect in the spring and summer. Many of the specimens are moth-eaten, poorly mounted and even mislabeled, though still recognizable, and valuable for study purposes. The greatest disadvantage at this particular time of the year is the utter lack of heat in the building. Even wearing long winter underwear, a parka and gloves, I found that only forty-five minutes was the longest possible length of time that I could endure in the place. It's absolutely beyond my comprehension how the Korean attendants can bear to frequent the building all day long and day after day. I often marvel at their extreme hardiness and great will to exist..."

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ROGER ORESMAN wrote from New York City in January: "...Although I haven't done as much birdwalking as I would like (working takes much more time than it should), I do get out once in a while with my young brother who is a much better birder than I am.

"We were out last Sunday, although most of the heavy snow that covered New York was still on the ground. The crust was not quite hard enough to support a man's weight and we broke through at every step which made walking difficult.

"We went to Pelham Bay Park which is at the end of one of the subways and on Long Island Sound. It was a good day, although cold and made slightly uncomfortable by an occasional snow flurry.

"The Sound was covered with rafts of ducks - several thousand of them. We saw scaup, American goldeneye, Red-breasted mergansers and Black ducks, and

25 Bufflehead - a large number of these exceptionally handsome ducks.

"Of land birds, we saw several jays, a redwing, some very busy downy woodpeckers and three very cold looking black-crowned night heron perched in a tree.

"A pair of pheasant paraded before us as we munched our lunch and a sparrow hawk hovered over the frozen marsh we were watching. A flock of crows chased a red tailed hawk out of a nearby wood and when we got into the woods we found a flock of goldfinch and a brown creeper.

"White-throated, song and tree sparrows were busy eating seeds from the plants that were still above the snow and whenever we looked up we could see herring gulls moving gracefully across the sky. We finished up the day by spotting a black-backed gull and a lone starling. Twenty species in all, a lot of fun and a good appetite for dinner were the total results..."

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FIELD NOTES: On December 31, 1947, I had the good fortune to see a number of skylarks on the island of Hawaii. The birds, being a new species to me, were identified by my guide. My friend, the guide and I were hunting sheep on the northwestern slope of Mauna Kea at an elevation of about 9000 feet, between the hours of 9:00 AM and noon. It was impossible to determine the exact number, as the birds flew up in front of us and we couldn't tell whether they were repeats or not, but there were two or three singing in the air overhead during most of the morning.

George Sonoda.

On January 4, 1948, the Paul Porters and D. H. Woodside went out to Mokapu to see the 1000 ducks reported to be seen in this area on December 21, 1947. They were still there, approximately 1000 of them. According to Ruth Porter they were not 100 yards from their previous position which lies a few hundred yards east and north of Kalekau pond (back of the old bird farm site). They were positively identified as pintails and appear to be in two large flocks. When they rose into the air half of them went up a hundred feet or so and then started to settle. The second half then rose making a very spectacular and confusing sight. There may have been a few individuals of other species mixed in with the flocks. Only four shoveler were counted in the Mokapu area, whereas eleven were seen on December 14, 1947.

The booby colony out in the crater area looked more promising than ever with about 400 adults present and many nestlings.

Other birds counted in the area were: Stilt, 141; Turnstone, 104; Plover, 86; Coot, 44; Rice bird, 36; Night heron, 8; Hawaiian tern, 6; Tattler, 2; Sanderling, 2; Frigate bird, 2; Brazilian cardinal, 2; Mynah, sparrow and dove were seen but not counted.

David Woodside.

Since the December weather was inappropriate for a bird walk up Tantalus, we agreed to go to the Kahuku Pond area instead. We started on our trip at 8:45 and reached Kahuku at 10:45. Upon our approach we saw several hunters shooting the migrating birds which are definitely closed all season. Along the roadside entering the airfield, there was a sign which read "NO SHOOTING." Therefore it was no excuse for the hunters to say they didn't know shooting was prohibited. They were just ignorant of the fact that these birds will eventually become scarce if they continue to shoot them.

We couldn't do anything about it, so we parked our cars and studied the situation. The birds that were feeding in the puddles around the airfield

were mostly plovers, although we saw several tattlers and a couple of turnstones. Cruising around the airfield, we found a dead plover; the victim of the unlawful shooting of the hunters.

It was about 11:30 when we decided to lunch before going down to the pond. On the mauka side of where we were sitting was the beautiful floriation of cane tassels. The silvery effect against the dark mountains reminded the mainlanders of their frost. It looked so much like frost that you could fool a malihini who did not know that frost is not seen here except on the Big Island.

On the makai side, the foaming white surf along the seacoast gave a very picturesque scene. Another beautiful sight was the breaking of the surf into foamy white sprays that dashed up the clear sand.

After finishing our lunch we proceeded to the pond. On our way, we heard the humming tune of a skylark. We were unable to spot the lark in its flight because it probably was too high and the sun's glare didn't help any.

When we reached the pond, it was deserted except for one or two herons that were resting on the far end of the pond. The hunters no doubt had raided the pond or scared the birds away. We were disappointed because we expected to see more birds than were there the last time we visited the pond.

We rested beside the plantation camp while Miss Hatch took the drivers back to the airfield to get the cars. It was about 2:15 when we left the pond. We had a nice day and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the trip.

Stanley Adams.

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EUROPEAN ORNITHOLOGISTS: At the last meeting two more families were "adopted" by our members, making a total of six families for whom some member, or group of members, is making himself responsible. We have also received to date \$24.00 for CARE packages and postage, in addition to that received earlier. For all of this, we are grateful. If you have intended to send a check, but it has slipped your mind, won't you do so today? This is the time of year when help is needed most.

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MARCH ACTIVITIES:

BIRD WALKS: March 14th. The weather prevented our trip to Kipapa last month, so we shall try it again this time. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 8:30 AM.

March 27th. We are scheduling a Saturday walk, in response to a number of requests. Meet at the Library of Hawaii at 8:00 AM. Destination will be decided by the participating group.

MEETING: March 15th, at 7:30 PM, at the auditorium of the Library of Hawaii. Mr. Vernon E. Brock of the Board of Agriculture and Forestry will report on the wild life conservation survey made by Mr. C. W. Schwartz last year.

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