

# THE AUK:

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF

ORNITHOLOGY.

---

VOL. XVII.

JULY, 1900.

No. 3.

---

OCCURRENCE OF *LARUS GLAUCESCENS* AND  
OTHER AMERICAN BIRDS IN HAWAII.

BY H. W. HENSHAW.

A CERTAIN interest attaches to the occurrence of birds in regions far distant from their customary bounds because such occurrences indicate one of the ways in which species are distributed. More than usual interest attaches to the occurrence of foreign species in the Hawaiian Islands because of the remoteness of the Island from continental areas, California, the nearest mainland, being some two thousand miles distant. The following desultory notes, therefore, will not be without value.

GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus glaucescens*).

This Gull is becoming an irregular though a rare visitor to the island of Hawaii, following vessels from San Francisco to Hilo. I learn from the captains of several vessels sailing between the two ports that the numerous Gulls that frequently attend the course of outward bound vessels usually turn about when off shore a hundred miles or so. Occasionally, however, one or two Glaucous Gulls, for some reason or other, fail to join their fellows on their homeward course, and day after day steadily follow in the course of the Island bound vessel. Such birds frequently, perhaps always, roost at night upon the yards.

Recently two Glaucous Gulls followed one of the U. S. transports from San Francisco clear into Hilo harbor where they lingered for several weeks and then disappeared, no one knows where. This particular transport happens to be painted white, which fact recalls the statement of an old mariner that Gulls are much more likely to follow in the wake of a white vessel than of any other, the simple explanation being that the birds are not so likely to lose track of a white vessel.

I have examined two Glaucous Gulls, shot in Hilo harbor, during my five years' residence in Hilo out of five or six that have been reported in this interval. One of them was in fine condition but the other weak and much emaciated.

I believe that none of these wanderers ever attempt to return to America but their final fate is unknown. No hint of the Glaucous Gull establishing itself upon the Hawaiian Islands is recorded, so far as I know, and the Islands are but illy adapted to their habits. The bird islands to the northwest, Laysan and others, would seem to be in every way adapted to this bird, and there in time the Glaucous Gull may become established.

That other species of American Gulls occasionally find their way to the Islands in the wake of vessels, especially to the harbor of Honolulu, is highly probable, and only the paucity of observers has prevented their detection and record.

#### BROWN GOONEY (*Diomedea chinensis*).

Every outward bound steamer and sailing vessel is met when well off shore from San Francisco by a number of Brown Goonies that fall into the vessel's wake and attach themselves to her till within a few hundred miles of the Islands, occasionally till within sight of port. As this Albatross was found by Mr. Rothschild's collector, Mr. Palmer, breeding abundantly upon Laysan there is nothing surprising in the above save the very business-like way the birds have of following vessels for the sake of the few scraps of meat thrown overboard, and the added fact that the Goonies also roost upon the vessels' yards at night.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*).

I am not aware that this Duck has hitherto been recorded from the Islands where it is a casual and possibly a rather regular winter visitor. Nov. 8, 1899, one of these Mergansers was shot by Mr. Otto Rose of Hilo near the town, being one of two seen. Nov. 28, I shot the surviving bird a mile or two further down the coast in a small salt water pond. It was fat and in fine order, and had in its throat two of the common fresh and brackish water fish known to the natives as Oopu.

The natives, to whom I showed this Duck, seemed in nowise surprised, claiming to have seen the species before though rarely. They gave it the name Mohá, but as this name is applied also, according to Mr. Dole, to the Shoveller its correct application is open to doubt. Present day natives know extremely little of Hawaiian birds and usually are either unable to name a bird at all or are in doubt.

In time, no doubt, as stated of the Gulls, particularly all the species of our northwest Ducks will be noted from the Islands, nothing being more likely than that a few stragglers will accompany the flocks of Shovellers and Pin-tails which are regular winter visitors.

RED PHALAROPE (*Crymophilus fulicarius*).

Brother Matthias of the Catholic Brotherhood has a mounted specimen of this bird in winter dress which he shot, together with several others, on the island of Mani in December, 1894. So far as I am aware this is the first record of the bird's occurrence upon the Islands. Brother Matthias informs me that the Phalaropes frequent some small inland ponds at Kahalui and are of not uncommon though irregular occurrence, two or three years often elapsing between their visits.

At the same time and place Brother Matthias shot two American Curlews (not the Bristle-thighed) which I judge from his description to be probably *Numenius hudsonicus*. These speci-

mens are still extant, and later I hope to be able to see and to identify positively the species.

Since the above was written I shot another Red Phalarope from a flock of Akekeke (*Arenaria interpres*) on the Hawaiian coast near Hilo, April 6. The bird may yet be found to be an irregular winter visitor to Hawaii, coming down with the flocks of Plover and Turnstones. That it should associate with the Turnstone, and with them feed in the upland cane fields, is rather remarkable. The flock from which my specimen was shot was on its way from upland to its roosting places on the coast.

#### SANDERLING (*Calidris arenaria*).

This species is recorded from Kanai by both Stejneger and Wilson. It appears to visit the Kau and Kona coasts of Hawaii annually in small numbers. In October, 1899, I shot two individuals at Kaalualu, Kau, and Mr. Sam Kauani, a resident who is well posted on the shore birds of the locality, assured me that it was by no means uncommon, and sometimes was seen in small flocks, oftener one or two in company with the Akekeke (*Arenaria interpres*).

#### WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*).

Mr. George C. Hewitt, Manager of Naaleho Plantation, Kau, informs me that he killed a 'Jack Snipe' near Naaleho some years ago. Mr. Hewitt is a sportsman and is very sure that the bird was no other than Gallinago with which he is well acquainted.

I feel sure that Island records of the shore birds of the northwest will multiply as time goes on. The immense flocks of Plover and Turnstone that each year wend their way from the American coast to the island must surely prove a magnet to attract other species hither, to say nothing of occasional individuals that mingle with these species in migration and unwittingly accompany them in their flight till all unwittingly they find themselves on foreign shores.

The whole subject of the migration of the Plover and other species to and from the distant mainland is of exceeding interest. Especially interesting would be any book bearing upon the manner of these migrations and the time taken in the flight.

As is well known, both the Plover (*Charadrius dominicus fulvus*) and the Akekeke (*Arenaria interpres*) leave the Island early in May in immense numbers and return in August. My friend, Mr. Patton, of Hakelau, Hawaii, has several times observed parties of Plover making the land, and always in a tired, if not an exhausted, condition. Once on land they seem to desire nothing but a chance to rest, but soon recuperate and go to feeding.

Capt. Chas. Watson has captained ships for years between San Francisco and Hilo. He tells me that only twice has he seen migrating birds, once flocks of Ducks flying north from the Islands, and once great numbers of Plovers<sup>1</sup> taking the same course. It is worth noting that in both instances this vessel was about 2000 miles to the north and west of Hawaii, and the inference is that the birds were steering a straight course for the Aleutians. I hope to learn of other masters of vessels who can furnish notes upon this subject, and especially do I hope to find some one who has seen the migrating flocks of Plover resting upon the ocean. For it does not seem probable that such good swimmers as are the Plover and Turnstone attempt to make so long a flight without rest, even if their powers of wing are equal to a task of such magnitude, which may be doubted.

In the above connection a note by Mr. Rothschild's collector, Mr. Palmer, is of great significance. He says (*Avifauna of Laysan*, Pt. I, p. 14), "A Kolea . . . flew also round the ship and considerably astonished me by settling on the water several times to rest." This was in August and the bird most probably had just made the downward trip from Alaska. If Plover and Turnstone rest freely upon the oft times calm Pacific, their passage over such long distances is more readily comprehended. That the Ducks can and do rest upon the ocean when tired, is not to be doubted. Even so, however, it is a mystery that birds should

---

<sup>1</sup> The term Plover upon the Islands usually includes both the Plover proper and the Akekeke, few discriminating between the two birds.

venture so far for a few months' sojourn upon the sunny Pacific Isles. However favorable the conditions, the trip must be full of hardship and danger, especially to the old, the young, and the sick, and doubtless thousands occasionally perish on the way, particularly in stormy weather. Why leave the safe mainland for islands twenty-five hundred miles away? In this connection it is of interest to note that by no means all the Kolea and Akekeke and Ulili (*Totanus incanus*) leave the Islands in spring. Thousands of the two former species remain all summer in the uplands and the Ulili is by no means uncommon along shore. I have examined numbers of such loiterers and find them, without exception, to be young birds, apparently birds of the year probably too immature to feel the mating impulse.

Adult birds on the contrary, shot in April, which already have assumed the nearly complete nuptial dress, reveal clearly upon dissection the effect of the all controlling passion, and I am not sure that in some cases they are not already paired before leaving the Island. Some wounded adult birds must preforce remain behind while their fellows, in obedience to the homing instinct — the strongest impulse that stirs the avian breast — seek the Alaskan tundras. Why do not such island prisoners breed? Food would seem to be abundant here in summer as in winter, and so far as temperature is concerned, the flanks of the lofty Hawaiian mountains offer any temperature from that of perpetual summer to everlasting winter.