

Hawaiian Islands Region

ROBERT L. PYLE

Winter rainfall was above normal at most stations in Hawaii this winter. Ducks grabbed the spotlight for birders, and a Short-tailed Albatross incubated an egg!

Abbreviations: F.F.S. (*French Frigate Shoals*); H. (*Hawai'i I.*); J.C.N.W.R. (*James Campbell N.W.R., O.*); K. (*Kaua'i I.*); M. (*Maui I.*); O. (*O'ahu I.*).

Albatross to Ducks

SA Short-tailed Albatross [*Endangered*] occurring at Midway Atoll as individual stragglers have been documented as far back as 1938. They come only in winter, mingling with the nesting Laysan and Black-footed albatross. One Short-tailed banded in the well-studied colony on the Japanese island of Torishima came as an 8-year-old sub-adult in 1972–1973, and returned annually through 1983–1984. The following year another banded bird

appeared, a 6-year-old sub-adult, and it has returned every winter since, including this season. Still another banded bird came as an 8-year-old sub-adult in 1989–1990, and has returned every year. These last two birds frequent different parts of Midway, and had not been observed together until March 1994.

This season, the younger bird was observed incubating an egg from mid-November–mid-December, the first report of this on Midway in at least 30 years. After being abandoned, the egg was collected and proved to be infertile. Its measurements were more consistent with a Short-tailed egg than with an adopted Black-footed or Laysan egg (SR, *'Elepaio* 54:35–36).

Still another Short-tailed Albatross was observed this year in Hawaii, on the ground at Tern I., F.F.S., Feb. 13 (CDI). This bird had been banded as a chick at Torishima in early 1989, and was sighted back at Torishima for the first time Nov. 26–29 (H. Hasegawa, *vide* BF), just 2.5 months before it appeared at Tern I. The same bird was observed Mar. 24 standing with Laysan Albatross at Kure Atoll (M. Craig, *vide* BF). Kure is some 1400 km n.w. of Tern I., and barely 100 km from Midway.

How long will it be before the United States gains its 3rd species of regularly breeding albatross?

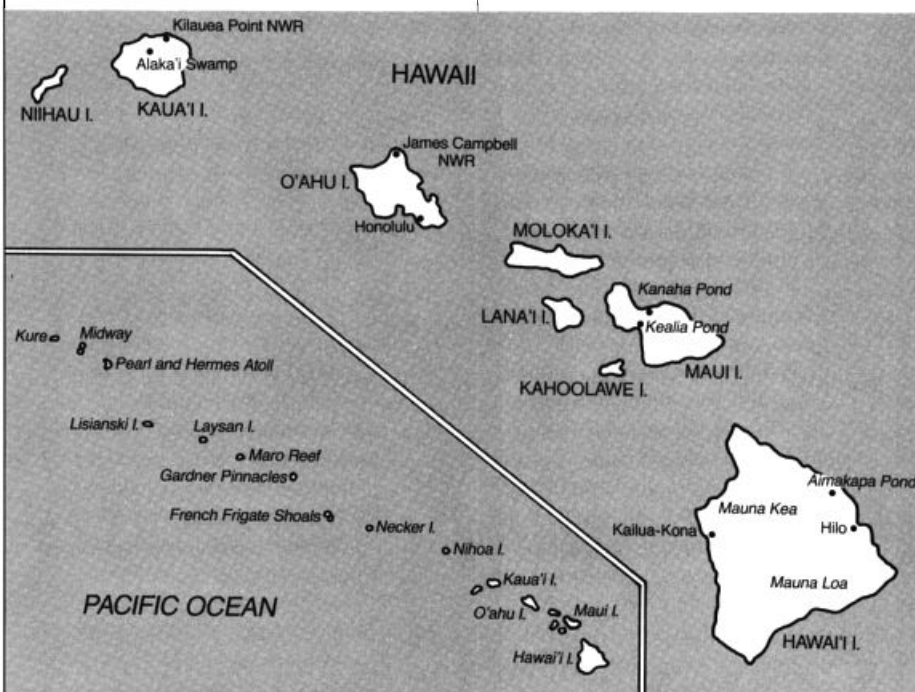
One Black-footed Albatross, two *Ptero-*

droma petrels, and four Sooty Shearwaters were seen among the more common seabirds off Kahuku Pt., O., Dec. 7 during 3 hours of sea-watching (EV). A Red-tailed Tropicbird was sighted Jan. 16 at Poholu Valley near the n. tip of Hawai'i I. (EV), an unexpected locality. The same observer counted at least 21 White-tailed Tropicbirds in Halemauau Crater, H., Jan. 14, a notably high count for that famed White-tailed locality. At Tern I., F.F.S., a White-tailed Tropicbird Jan. 12–13 and a ♂ Lesser Frigatebird Jan. 23 (CDi) were unusual stragglers. A Snowy Egret was reported at Kealia Pond, M., Jan. 16 (RD), and the vagrant White-faced Ibis at Aimakapa Pond, H. since July was observed repeatedly during Januuary (KI, EV, TM).

SA Fulvous Whistling-Ducks first occurred in Hawaii at J.C.N.W.R. 12 years ago. Subsequent breeding increased numbers and up to 26 birds together were recorded in one pond in the late 1980s. They remained for the most part at J.C.N.W.R. and adjoining Amorient Aquafarm, but numbers there have since declined. Recent counts have all been <10 birds. This season, eight birds were seen in flight at J.C.N.W.R., Jan. 1 (TS). Four were recorded twice in December (LT, EV), two Jan. 27 (PD), and none were reported on various trips to the area in February. Perhaps these birds have dispersed to unknown areas, or perhaps something has inhibited their reproduction in recent years.

Hawaii, sadly, is accustomed to losing endemic species to extinction. Now it may be losing one of the 2 indigenous species that have naturally colonized the state during the past 2 decades.

The great array of migrant *Anas* and *Aythya* duck species reported last season remained through the winter, enjoyed by observers at favored wetlands on all major islands and at Midway Atoll. Other unusual duck visitors enlivened the winter. Buffleheads were reported on 4 islands and on Midway. Two of these at Loko Waka Pond near Hilo, H. were well-described in male plumage (MK), almost unprecedented in Hawaii where virtually all prior reports have been of female plumaged birds. A Hooded Merganser in female plumage reported at Wailua Res., K., Nov. 30 and Dec. 27 (DK), is one of very few records for the state. A ♀ Com. Merganser (seen off and on at Kealia in recent years) was there Dec. 20 & 28 (P&HB). A winter ♂ Ruddy Duck, accidental in



Hawaii, was found at a stock pond off of Keanakolu Rd. high on the slope of Mauna Kea, H., Dec. 8 (TS). At Kealia Pond, M., two ♂ Ruddies were seen well Dec. 18 & 19 and Jan. 26, and two ♀ Ruddies were with them Dec. 19 (P&HB). But the bird of the year was an **Oldsquaw** in fine winter plumage, first seen Dec. 4 near Haleiwa, O. (S.Scott); it moved to nearby Loko Ea Pond and remained easily observable (m.ob.) to at least early February. A vagrant collected years ago at Midway is the only prior state record. This winter certainly produced the most exciting and spectacular duck-watching in recent memory.

Osprey to Owls

An Osprey was reported at Menehune Fish-pond, K., Feb. 19 (DK). A juv. N. Harrier, rare in Hawaii, was observed near Paliku Cabin in Haleakala Crater, M. on several dates through December (P&HB), and the imm. harrier at Midway reported last season remained to at least Jan. 1 (SR).

Several Com. (Hawaiian) Moorhens (*Endangered*) have moved into the new wetland sanctuary area at the upper end of Kaelepulu Pond in Kailua, O. A pair with two–three downy chicks was seen there Jan. 22 & 29 (LT). Some of the unusual shorebird species from fall remained into winter, and some new ones were reported. A Killdeer, very rare in Hawaii, was at Amorient Aquafarm and adjoining Kii Ponds from Dec. 4 to at least early February (PD, EV, LT). Common Snipe were reported on O'ahu—four through the winter at J.C.N.W.R. and three at Waipi'o Pen., PD *et al.*—and also on Maui—two at Kanaha Pond Dec. 28 (P&HB) and one at the pond along Hansen Rd., Jan. 29 (TS).

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse have not been reported in recent years, but they turned up this season at their favored haunt on the cement plant road s. of Waimea, H. Eight–ten were on the ground Jan. 4 (KI). Short-eared Owls, likely from Asia, usually appear at Midway Atoll in winter, but none showed up this season (SR).

Endemic Hawaiian Passerines

Ten state and federal biologists surveyed transects throughout the prime forest areas of the Alaka'i region of Kauai for 7 full working days Feb. 22–Mar. 3. Their report of 18 visual or audio encounters with Puaiohi (PC, JD, TS) was encouraging. This is the only one of Kauai's *Endangered* forestbird species that has been seen in recent years. The biologists found *none* of the 4 other critically *Endangered* species, which have not been confidently reported since the late 1980's. Among the more common species, the Apapane and Iiwi, which feed

and dwell mostly in the canopy, were down significantly in number, perhaps because of severe damage to canopy trees from hurricane *Iniki* a year-and-half earlier (PC). The outlook for Kauai's scarcer endemic forestbirds is grim, and getting grimmer.

On O'ahu, some interesting counts of Com. Amakihi were made on various trails in the Ko'olau Mts. In mid-December, 24 were found along the Ko'olau Crest trail in 3 days of hiking, and 52 along the full length of Aiea Trail from the crest to the park (EV). CBCs included 27 on Manoa Cliffs Trail and 12 on Manana Trail (PD), and 18 were found on lower Aiea Trail Jan. 11 (PD). Apapane counts on the same dates were 137 and 101 on the Ko'olau Crest and Aiea Trails, 23 at Manoa Cliffs, 14 at Manana, and 32 at lower Aiea (PD). Counts on Poamoho Trail (n. of most of the other trails) Jan. 5 totaled 20 Apapane and only 2 Amakihi (PD). Seldom do we have an array of counts like this in such a short period on O'ahu.

Other Passerines

Hwamei are being reported again on O'ahu after almost disappearing in recent decades. One was heard in upper Kahana Valley about Dec. 17 (EV); five were recorded on Manana Trail for the CBC Dec. 26 (PD) and three on Aiea Trail Jan. 11 (PD). Red-billed Leiothrix are continuing their comeback on O'ahu. Counts of 12 on Manoa Cliffs Trail Dec. 13 (PD), 18 on Aiea Trail Dec. 19 (EV), and 17 on Manana Trail Dec. 26 (PD) were reported. At least 10 Yellow-faced Grassquits were observed on Manana Trail, O., Dec. 21 (TS), and 15 were reported there Dec. 26 (PD). The ♂ Great-tailed Grackle was still at Sand Island Park, O., Dec. 26, being chased by mynas (PBr). Two Orange-cheeked Waxbills were seen Jan. 10 at Wai'alea Iki Park in e. Honolulu (PD), an interesting locality for this scarce species.

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West Indies Region

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Correspondence from resident observers from Bermuda and Barbados highlight this season's report. And observations from several localities in the Dominican Republic in December provide some insight on endemic species distributions and winter populations of certain neotropical migrant warblers, which appeared to be in low numbers. Comparisons to earlier Christmas Bird Counts in the Dominican Republic may shed interesting light on this trend.

Precipitation measured at the Virgin Islands National Park at Cruz Bay, St. John, United States Virgin Islands, during the period was 36% below average (December -31%, January unavailable, February -46%). A sustained drought during this season implied that migrant landbirds anticipating normal insects, fruit, or nectar resources would be set back by an energy imbalance through a depressed food chain. Shorebirds and waterfowl using salt ponds and ephemeral pools would also have been low in numbers at this latitude.

Although our Barbados correspondent suggested that "there were no significant weather systems which affected the area," one wonders to what extent a protracted 1993–1994 El Niño effect contributed to Barbados' lack of shorebird rarities this year, or reduced migrant numbers elsewhere.

The continued presence of Western Reef-Heron and Little Egrets at Graeme Hall Swamp, Barbados, and other sites in the Lesser Antilles suggests that these species may be on the verge of becoming established colonizers in the West Indies, rather than occasional or lingering vagrants from Africa.

Many may already know of the death of one of the Region's greatest champions of West Indian birdlife, Gabriel Charles, MBE, of St. Lucia. Charles was not only a friend and a contributor to the Region's reports, but a tireless proponent of studying the common birds of his homeland, as well as forestalling the extinction of a national symbol. He believed that studying the life of the St. Lucia Oriole might reveal secrets of the decline of some of the lesser-known birds of St. Lucia and, indeed, among the cohorts of the Windward Islands. We will miss Charles and his energy deeply.