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AVIFAUNA OF LAYSAN. *and the Neighbouring* vii
Islands

DIARY OF HENRY PALMER.

From May 5th to August 18th, 1891.

May 5 & 6 (Honolulu).—These two days were spent in looking for a vessel for my expedition and obtaining permission from the Laysan Guano Company to collect on their islands.

May 9.—Arranged with Capt. Walker for the trip and put my things on board. I am very nervous, as he lost his last vessel among these same islands; but I must go with him, as this is the only chance.

May 10 & 11.—I spent these days in preparing for my voyage and in hunting up a Captain Rosskill, who had brought three living specimens of the Laysan-Island Rail to Honolulu.

May 12.—I went to see the Rails and bought two of the three specimens. As there was no steamer leaving for Europe, I was obliged to kill and skin them. On the journey from Laysan they had been fed on canary-seed and potatoes.

May 21.—It is now a little more than a week since I last wrote in my diary, but I was too disgusted at the innumerable delays and crotchets of Capt. Walker. Yesterday only did we get the schooner alongside the wharf, so many alterations and improvements had to be made; but now everything is settled, and if the weather is favourable we start to-morrow.

May 23.—At last everything is ready and I am once again on the water, bound for the islands I have to explore. This evening we have anchored 30 miles from Honolulu to get everything straight before going right out to sea.

May 24.—At sea. Nothing to note.

May 25.—Weather fine, but heavy sea running. I expect to-morrow to reach Niihau, or Bird Island.

May 26.—Reached Bird Island at 2 o'clock, but the swell was too heavy to land. We sailed all round it before leaving. There seemed to be any quantity of sea-birds on it. The island itself is only a large rock with very scanty vegetation; all I could see were two small groups of some kind of palms. While sailing round the island some Gannets came and settled on our bowsprit, and I caught three of them, all of one kind, although I saw another species flying round. I here mention the various species of sea-birds we saw on Niihau as far as I could identify them:—

2 species of Albatross. [Probably *Diomedea immutabilis*, Rothsch., and *Diomedea chinensis*, Temm.—W. R.]

2 species of Gannet. [*Sula sula* and *S. piscator*.—W. R.]

3 species of Petrel. [These are probably the same as those of Laysan.—W. R.]

6 or 7 species of Tern. [Probably *Anous stolidus*, *A. hawaiiensis*, *Haliplana fuliginosa* ad. and juv., *A. cinereus*?, *Gygis candida*, and *H. lunata*.—W. R.]

A small flock of Akekeke came flying off the island when we were opposite the landing-place, took a circle round, and disappeared. [*Strepsilas interpres*, L.—W. R.]

In the evening I saw another flock of these birds flying the same way as the vessel was steering and as though they were migrating to another island. I also noticed some Red-tailed Tropic-birds [*Phaëton rubricauda*.—W. R.] flying round the island, and their love-making in

the air was accompanied by some peculiar evolutions. The male, on approaching the female, swung his tail from side to side and up and down, almost doubling it up under him, and this it continued for a long time.

May 30.—On account of the very bad weather we have had since Wednesday I have been unable to write my log, but I take notes as I go along, which I here record. On the 27th at sea all day and nothing to note.

May 28.—Passed and sailed round Necker Island. A strong wind and a heavy sea made landing impossible. Necker Island is a large rock with no vegetation whatever upon it; nearly all round its sides appeared perpendicular, except one small place on the S.W. side, where in calm weather I believe I could have landed, but I did not see the use of staying round this island for an indefinite period to await a calm sea: we therefore made straight for French Frigate Islands, where we have just anchored (May 30), but cannot land yet on account of the surf. All the way from Niihau we have seen plenty of the same species of sea-birds I have mentioned before, but yesterday, for the first time, I saw a Storm-Petrel [*Thalassidroma?*—W. R.].

French Frigate Islands are simply large low sandbanks with little or no vegetation on them. There is also one rock, a hundred and twenty-five feet high, which it is perfectly impossible to land on, but it is covered with sea-birds.

May 31.—This evening I have camped out on one of the sandbanks, the ship being three miles off. This bank is literally covered with birds, chiefly two species of Tern. Most of their young are nearly ready to fly, some even are flying. Besides these Terns there are a few Gannets and Albatross. My assistant and I have to-day carefully examined all the birds on this shoal, inspecting eggs, young, &c. The White-breasted Tern (*Haliplana fuliginosa*) lays only one egg and deposits it anywhere on the sand; their young are of a dark brown colour with spots, and are the same bird which I mistook for a different species on Niihau (cf. *antea*, p. vii).

The other Tern mentioned above also lays one egg only, but seems to prefer the centre of small growing bunches of grass to deposit it on. A few of the Gannets are still incubating, although some young birds are almost ready to fly. They lay their eggs on the sand, two in number, and the egg is extremely small for the size of the bird. We also found what I believe to be Albatross eggs, but as we could not identify the parents I did not collect any. There are also a few "Ulili" (*Totanus incanus*) on the island, and I also saw a few "Akekeke" (*Strepsilas interpres*) when we landed. There were also a lot of turtle on the islands; but the photographs will give a better idea of the immense number of sea-birds on these shoals than anything I can write.

June 1.—All to-day I have been busy skinning and preserving specimens. Capt. Walker came off from the ship to us and talks of remaining till the 5th; but as our water has almost all leaked out, it depends on what provisions he sends to-morrow whether I can stay on the sandbank or not. To-day we obtained specimens of a Petrel which breeds here, and so I believe I have obtained every species of bird that breeds on this island.

June 2.—Capt. Walker sent a boat this morning to say he intended at once to change his anchorage to another island, so I went on board again about mid-day.

June 3.—We left our anchorage this morning and sailed for the island of Laysan.

again in the evening off two small sandbanks. As I saw no birds on them I did not go on shore. Captain Walker's sons, however, went and found a few turtle and Boobies (*Sula sula*). We went quite close to the previously-mentioned rock, and, on firing a rifle, among the birds that got up I saw a pair of another species of Tern I had not got and also a third species of Gannet.

I see further ahead an island apparently full of birds, which I hope to reach to-morrow, as the weather is now nice and fine.

June 4.—Weighed anchor and sailed up to the island I have just mentioned. It is only a rather larger sandbank than the one we had just left. There were plenty of birds on it, but chiefly the same as I had got before, though the young of the Black Albatross were much more plentiful. I also got another species of Petrel which was sitting on the ground, but only obtained one out of the pair I saw. Here I also found the White Gannet [*Sula piscator*.—W. R.] nesting. This bird builds a nest among, and made of, some species of vine growing on the island, and the nest is not unlike those of the Shags (*Phalacrocorax*). All the nests I examined were very similar and built in the centre of the vine, round and flat, and about six inches above the ground. Each nest had only one egg. The young of the Pied Tern (*Anous fuliginosus*) were all much younger than on the island I had been before, very few being able to fly. The large Petrel, of which there were a few stragglers on the former island, were here very plentiful, sitting on the sand in pairs. There were also a few Frigate-birds round about, but I did not trouble to shoot any, as, according to report, they are very plentiful on Laysan Island.

June 5.—At 6 in the morning I went on to the island again, as we were to leave at 11 o'clock. While turning up some turtle-shells that had been heaped up by a shipwrecked crew, I discovered a third species of Petrel sitting on its egg; of this we obtained ten or eleven besides six eggs. I also obtained some more of the Petrel I got one specimen of yesterday. Of the large Petrel I saw several males in the act of copulation, so I have no doubt they will soon commence to lay. I saw several of them in their burrows in the sand.

June 6.—We continued our journey last night and are now bound for Gardner Island. The weather is very calm. Unfortunately my assistant (Munroe) is ill with "La Grippe," and it is so terribly hot that I hardly know what to do with my skins. The young birds in down I cannot do anything with, which is very discouraging, but in future I shall put them in spirit.

June 7.—At sea. Weather very calm. Hope to reach Gardner Island to-morrow.

From June 7th to June 13th we were occupied in beating round for Gardner Island, having experienced bad weather and for some time had lost our course. Owing to the rough sea there was no possibility of landing on Gardner Island, and the only birds I saw were the White Tern (*Gygis*), the Grey-backed Tern [*Haliplana lunata*.—W. R.], the Tropic-bird, and the Frigate-bird. On the 13th we lay in a dead calm, and I fear we may be a long time before we reach Laysan, and all this delay is owing to bad management on board.

June 16.—At last we reached Laysan, having sighted it just after daylight. From what I can see of the island I am in hopes that I shall be able to make up a little of the lost time, for, to my great delight, the island appears quite alive with birds, especially the Rail, which, although I had been told was tolerably plentiful, to my intense astonishment literally