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REPORT
OF AN
EXPEDITION TO LAYSAN ISLAND
IN 1911

UNDER THE JOINT AUSPICES OF THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND
THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

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The struggle for existence on Laysan is most keen at all times. The inevitable operation of the law of nature that balances the food supply with the number to be fed is as effective on this sand island as it is everywhere else in the world. As a matter of fact, a marked reduction in the number of pairs of all the land birds can be noticed as compared with the number of the same species on the island eight years ago. The Laysan canary, Miller bird, Laysan honey eater, and the Laysan rail, without doubt, are doomed to extermination on the isolated island on which they have maintained themselves long enough to develop into distinct species, unless something is done to preserve for them the source of their food supply.

Rare as the Laysan teal has always been, it is gratifying to find that it has not been wiped out of existence. Eight years ago there were several small flocks of this interesting bird, which is without doubt the rarest wild duck in the world. This year only seven adult birds were seen during an entire day especially devoted to watching for it on the small fresh-water lake and the main lagoon—the natural rallying place for the species. Ducks were seen on five of the seven days spent on shore, but there were by no means as many of them as there were on the occasion of my former visit. One pair seen had a flock of five young following them. Thus it will be seen that while this rare species is not extinct, as was greatly feared, it is so rare that there are probably not more than a half dozen adult pairs on the island at this time.

Even after the wholesale slaughter of the birds and the result it had on their nesting and mating habits, the birds remain as fearless as ever. There is not a species on Laysan that can not be caught in the hands with a little care and patience. One pair of ducks, for example, came up within 6 feet of the writer, a lack of fear which would make the species an easy one to exterminate should poachers at any time make another raid on the island inhabitants.

Rabbits now literally swarm over the island by thousands. The amount of damage done by them can better be imagined than told. They are exterminating first one species of plant then another. Several species that were common everywhere eight years ago have entirely gone, others are already doomed. Unless some drastic measures are resorted to within a very short time not a bush or spear of grass will be alive.

There is no indication that the islands of Laysan and Laysianski have been visited by hunting vessels since the last visit of the *Thetis*. It is to be hoped that for the time being at least the traffic in birds' wings and feathers has been broken up in these waters. However, there is no assurance that it will not be renewed without notice, hence the necessity for continuing the service of the *Thetis* or a similar vessel, and the necessity of making frequent visits at irregular intervals to all of the islands of the reservation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROTECTION OF THE
RESERVATION.

As to the future care of this wonderful colony, I would suggest that the most effective way to conserve the bird life is to appoint a warden for the reservation who should have general supervision of these low-lying islands and their bird inhabitants. A resident warden should then be provided who should be supplied with a small auxiliary power schooner, or a large power sampan, that would enable him to make frequent and unannounced visits at irregular intervals to all of the islands along the chain. The installation of a wireless telegraph station at Midway, where the power and facilities are already available, would add greatly to the convenience and safety of commerce and trans-Pacific travel and would put the islands of the chain in direct touch with Honolulu and the outside world.

If a vessel such as has been suggested should be stationed at Laysan or Midway Island it would be an important step toward the proper supervision of all the outlying islands, whether included in the reservation or not. Naturally the people and the authorities of the Territory of Hawaii feel a keen interest in the welfare of this reservation. A feeling is growing that the day is not far distant when this Territory will look upon the Leeward chain of islands as forming a great natural park as interesting and wonderful in its way and as instructive to visit as are any of the other famous national parks.

The visiting of these islands and reefs by interested persons, should they be opened to the public under proper regulations and supervision, will result in no harm to the breeding colony, as the long residence of the guano company on the island of Laysan has proven. As years go by and the birds become more rare elsewhere, the great reservation thus conserved in the mid-Pacific will be an object of world interest and concern. The birds themselves are a valuable possession to Hawaii and the nation, while as an attraction to visitors as well as to the residents of these islands they represent, as yet, an asset that is scarcely appreciated.

It is urged that the Federal Government and the Territorial government should at once become actively interested in these islands and that measures should be taken to safeguard the birds against the possibility of further despoliation by plume hunters. It is also urged that steps should be taken to introduce the rare land birds of Laysan on other of the low islands of the chain where conditions are favorable in order to prevent the extermination of these interesting and valuable birds in the manner I have suggested.

At least three of the land forms of Laysan are of unquestioned economic importance and of great value to the Territory of Hawaii as the natural enemies of certain noxious and injurious insects. The difficult problem of their transportation and introduction into the

Set up Laysan Island as site for storing radioactive waste

The state of Hawaii can earn a billion dollars and better Oahu environmentally by setting aside Laysan Island for the storage of radioactive waste.

Laysan is legally a part of Hawaii more than 900 statute miles distant from Oahu. The island has a land area of 790 acres, and a channel depth of over 16,000 feet.

One of the first applicants for the storage of radioactive waste on Laysan Island should be the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard. The accumulation of waste there and the safeguards in storage have been shown and explained to our legislators. Pearl Harbor is joined in this problem by naval shipyards and by commercial power reactors over the United States.

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