

'ELEPAIO

Journal of the
Hawaii Audubon Society



For the Protection of
Hawaii's Native Wildlife

VOLUME 37, NUMBER 6

DECEMBER 1976

KAULA--HAWAII'S FORGOTTEN BIRD ISLAND

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(Originally published in The Sunday Star-Bulletin & Advertiser, 16 Nov. 1975, pp.F-1 & F-6)

5= The Island of Kaula was one of the five Hawaiian Islands seen by Captain Cook during his first visit in 1778. Following Cook's death during the second visit in 1779, Kaula was the last island seen when the expedition's vessels departed from Hawaiian waters.

Today, Kaula has been virtually forgotten by the people of Hawaii and remains practically unknown to the outside world. There can be little doubt that the U.S. Navy would like it to stay that way. To them, the island is known as the Kaula Rock Target.

Kaula covers 136 acres (four times the size of Ala Moana shopping center) and is located 20 miles to the southwest of Niihau and 150 miles to the west-northwest of Honolulu. The island rises abruptly to an elevation of 550 feet and has been described as appearing like a huge sea turtle on the horizon.

In 1909, President Theodore Roosevelt set aside nearly all of the small volcanic and coral islands in the northwestern portion of the Hawaiian chain as a sanctuary for wildlife. Millions of migratory seabirds, as well as seals and turtles, depend on these islands for breeding purposes. The result of Roosevelt's farsighted conservation action can be seen today as the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, one of the most outstanding natural preserves in the world.

Only two of the northwestern islands, Kaula and Midway, were not covered by the Presidential Order of 1909. Both of these islands should have been. Apparently there was little reason or incentive at the time to have strategically located Midway officially declared a sanctuary. By 1909 the island had been colonized for some six years by the Commercial Pacific Cable Company. Midway's massive albatross populations were therefore already safe from the Japanese feather poachers that were slaughtering hundreds of thousands of birds on the other small islands in the chain.

The reason for not including Kaula in the sanctuary perhaps will never be positively known. The importance of Kaula as a nesting site for numerous species of seabirds was well-known to the Hawaiian people. Possibly this information was not available to President Roosevelt, thereby causing the island to be simply overlooked and forgotten. Another possibility is that Kaula's steep cliffs may have been regarded as a natural defense against feather poachers. Federal protection may not have been thought necessary in order to ensure the birds' continued well-being. This explanation would seem to be the most reasonable, as the first known landing on the island by a non-Hawaiian did not take place until 1920. Even then, the individual was unable to reach the summit.

Whatever the original reason for not including Kaula in the Presidential Order of 1909, the result has been, and continues to be, the destruction of nesting seabirds by military bombs and gunfire. The events that brought about this incompatible and intolerable use of public property provide an interesting lesson in land acquisition and environmental degradation.

In December of 1924, Territorial Governor Farrington signed Executive Order 173 which set aside Kaula Island for public purposes as a United States Lighthouse Reservation under the control of the Department of Commerce. During the summer of 1925, personnel of the Lighthouse Service succeeded in building a trail to the island's summit. On the top, two stone structures were found that were thought to be religious shrines. A shelter cave with a low stone wall across the entrance was also discovered. These findings confirmed the

reports of Captain Cook that early Hawaiians periodically made visits to Kaula.

Due to unfavorable weather conditions, Lighthouse Service personnel were not able to make another landing on the island until the summer of 1932. At that time an automatic gas light was constructed and put into service. The first and only published survey of the island's flora and fauna was also conducted in the summer of 1932. Results of this survey appeared in a Bishop Museum report and revealed that 15 species of plants and 14 species of seabirds were present. Among the birds in greatest abundance were noddy and sooty terns, red-tailed tropicbirds, blue-faced, red-footed and hooded brown boobies, and frigatebirds. White terns, petrels and shearwaters were also found. The biology of Kaula was clearly typical of the other isolated islands in the northwestern portion of the Hawaiian chain.

Practically no information about Kaula is available for the 25 years following installation of the automatic light. It seems safe to assume that, except for yearly maintenance visits, the island and its seabirds were left in peace. In Washington, however, one significant event did take place during this period that would ultimately affect the island's safety. In 1939, the Lighthouse Service of the Department of Commerce was integrated into the U.S. Coast Guard. In 1947, 25 years after installation, the Kaula light was permanently closed down. This action extinguished the island's hope for remaining unmolested.

The first admitted bombing and strafing by Navy and Marine Corps aircraft started in 1952. This was apparently initiated with the blessing of the Coast Guard. However, no records can be found which show that the Territorial Government, Congress or the President ever granted approval for bombing, or was even officially notified of this action. Between 1952 and 1965 the Coast Guard continued to hold jurisdiction over Kaula and, at the same time, apparently raised no objections to the military's delivery of all kinds of ordnance. In addition to the standard bombings, strafings and use of high intensity flares, this ordinance also at time included torpedos and Regulus missiles fired from submarines.

Beginning in the 1960s, residents of Kauai started to voice opposition to this senseless killing of seabirds, many of which are valuable to fishermen for locating schools of fish and detecting ocean current changes. People living on Kauai seemed to be the most concerned, probably because at night they could actually see what the military was doing. For most other residents in the state, Kaula was out of sight, and out of mind. In 1961 the Kauai Board of Supervisors officially asked the Navy to halt the bombing. Their request was promptly and quietly rejected, as many other such requests have been during the years that followed.

In early 1965, members of Hawaii's congressional delegation were called upon for aid in the matter. In response to an inquiry by Rep. Patsy Mink, the Department of the Interior (administrators of the National Refuge System) stated that Kaula has "...impressive value as a nesting area for certain seabirds..." and that it is "...highly desirable that the Island of Kaula be considered for National Wildlife Refuge status as an addition to the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge." Further, Mrs. Mink was told that everything possible would be done to have the island incorporated into the Refuge. Unfortunately, the Department of the Interior subsequently dropped the matter, after being told by the Navy that Kaula was vital to the war effort in Vietnam. Conservation groups on Kauai also agreed to stop campaigning against the Navy, after being told the same thing.

In March 1965, Rep. Spark Matsunaga publicly announced that jurisdiction of Kaula had been officially transferred from the Coast Guard to the Navy. The island's "give-away" therefore took place without organized opposition, in the name of national security. It is interesting to note that throughout the crisis of World War II, the bombing of Kaula and its seabirds had not been considered necessary by the military for "national security" or "defense readiness." Kaula would again have drifted out of public eye after Navy acquisition, had it not been for the pilots of two Skyraiders from the aircraft carrier Ticonderoga enroute to Vietnam. On the night of Oct. 5, 1965 these pilots became "confused" (as it was later explained) and dropped eight 250-pound bombs on Niihau, 32 miles from their intended destination of Kaula. Fortunately, the explosions took place in an unpopulated area. Nearly two days passed before the Navy publicly announced the incident. In the meantime, members of Hawaii's congressional delegation were informed through newspaper sources. Senator Hiram Fong accused the Navy of "gross carelessness," and Mrs. Mink renewed her call for an end to bombing, both for the safety of people and the sake of seabirds. Senator Daniel Inouye expressed "anger and dismay." In the end, however, the Navy refused to halt bombardments, even long enough for an investigation of the incident.

Little else was heard of Kaula until August 1971, when the Navy conducted a two day environmental survey of the island with the help of State and Federal biologists. Rather than reflecting a sudden change of attitude, this survey was prompted by a direct request from former president Nixon. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 requires that statements be filed outlining the environmental effects resulting from actions that are federally funded. Military bombardments of islands and seabirds come under this category. A newspaper article announced the completion of the two-day survey; however, in the following months and years no reports were made available and an Environmental Impact Statement was never filed.

Although the exact status of Kaula's environment presently remains a mystery to the public, fishermen in the area report that seabirds still nest, or at least attempt to nest, on the island. This would suggest that the island is not now, nor has it ever been, the barren or worthless "rock" to which it is sometimes referred.

The recent renewal of efforts to have the bombing of Kahoolawe stopped should also encompass the Island of Kaula, Hawaii's forgotten bird island should no longer continue to be forgotten. A reasonable, but definite, date should be set for halting all bombardments. This should be on or before January 1978, the 200th anniversary of Kaula's European discovery. Following the cessation of destruction, the island should at long-last be transferred to the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge where it belongs. This seems the least that could be done after 23 years of military use.

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Field Notes from C. Fred Zeillemaker: Kauai, Maui, Molokai & Hawaii; Dec.1975-Aug.1976
Pied-billed Grebe--The Lumahai River estuary (Kauai) bird found in November was also observed there January 15 and 22, March 4, and April 14.

Black-footed Albatross--Four birds were observed at Kilauea Point Wildlife Admin. Site (WAS), Kauai, by Rick Howie of Canada on January 16. I observed a single bird there February 21.

Laysan Albatross--Single birds appeared at Kilauea Point WAS in December, one to three birds were regularly observed in January, February and March, six were observed March 27, up to three were spotted in April, and a single bird was observed May 1.

Wedge-tailed Shearwater--The last 1975 observation at Kilauea Point occurred December 10. The species was discovered back in burrows there March 7, but birds may have actually arrived a few days earlier. The first chicks were found July 28.

Newell's Shearwater--Calling was detected in the Anahola Mountains, Kauai, on April 28. One struck the lighthouse at Kilauea Point WAS May 26. Road killed birds were found between Kealia and the Wailua River in April-2, May-3, June-15, July-7, and August-2.

Red-tailed Tropicbird--A bird returned to Kilauea Point WAS on February 13 (Norma Christie of Canada). Up to 3 were observed in March, 9 in April and May, 7 in June, 8 in July and 6 in August.

Blue-faced Booby--Single birds paused at Mokuaeae Island off Kilauea Point May 28, June 7, and July 24.

Brown Booby--Up to 6 birds used Mokuaeae Island off Kilauea Point in December, 4 in

