

# BIRD NOTES FROM THE KINGDOM OF TONGA

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## INTRODUCTION

In March and again in April 1974 I visited Tonga for about one week, the first visit was limited to Tongatapu, but the second also brought me to Vava'u.

Since so little seems to be published on the birds of Tonga, it seems worthwhile to record even these very incomplete and accidental notes.

As far as the non-marine birds go Mayr (1945) mentions 20 breeding species of which only one is endemic (*Pachycephala melanops*).

Since Mayr wrote this book two species have become established: the Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) and the European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). The bulbul occurs both in Fiji and in Samoa and the subspecies there is *bengalensis* L. (Mercer 1966). I did not observe any difference between the birds in Tonga and those in Samoa so I presume the subspecies must be the same.

The European Starling is recorded by Mercer (1967) as occurring on some islands of the Fiji group.

To the list of non-marine birds 6 migratory species must be added (5 waders and the Long-tailed Cuckoo) and Mayr mentions that *Hirundo tahitica* was recorded once.

During my short visits in Tonga I observed 13 breeding and 5 migratory species, and further 8 species of sea birds.

## LIST OF SPECIES

The observations are summarised per species.

Red-footed Booby, *Sula sula*

27/4/74: Vava'u — 1 adult and 2 juveniles of this species identified among about 10 boobies feeding over sea at Neiafu.

25/4/75: One unidentified booby at Nuku'alofa pier.

Great Frigate Bird, *Fregata minor*

27/4/74: An adult female over Nuku'alofa flying very low. A strong northerly wind was blowing.

Fairy Tern, *Gygis alba*

24/3/74: Abundant over sea along the southern coast of Tongatapu at the Blowholes.

28/3/74: One holding a fish flying overland at the radio-mast, probably breeding.

Sooty Tern, *Sterna fuscata*

27/4/74: Two close to the coast in Neiafu, Vava'u.

**Black-naped Tern, *Sterna sumatrana***

25 & 27/4/74: 2 and 1 flying along the coast, Neiafu, Vava'u.

**Crested Tern, *Thalasseus bergi***

Regularly seen in small numbers over lagoons and reefs in Tongatapu and Vava'u.

25/3/74: 2 fishing in shallow water at low tide in lagoon near Nuku'alofa.

25/4/74: 2 at the pier in Nuku'alofa — one in wing moult, one with a completely black crown.

25, 26, 27/4/74: Neiafu, Vava'u, 3 to 5 seen fishing over reef.

**Brown Noddy, *Anous stolidus***

24/3/74: Large numbers fishing off the southern coast of Tongatapu with Fairy Terns at the Blowholes.

27/4/74: A flock of 20 fishing in quite rough water, Vava'u.

**Black Noddy, *Anous tenuirostris***

27/4/74: 10 fishing much closer to the coast than the Brown Noddies picking up food among floating detritus, Vava'u.

**Pacific Golden Plover, *Pluvialis dominica***

Common in March, only a few left at the end of April. On cliffs, on reefs, but mainly along beaches or on grass. On 27 March in a sample of 8, 4 had some black and 2 were completely in summer dress at Kanokupolu. On the airport on 23 April several dozens could be seen. On 27 April at high tide they were resting one by one along the narrow beach of Kanokupolu.

In April in Vava'u a few were seen on the mud flats and on 27 April about twenty were observed on a lawn in Neiafu.

**American Wandering Tattler, *Heteroscelus incanus***

This species occurs mainly on mud flats and was quite common at the end of March in Tongatapu. On 25, 26 and 27 April in Vava'u several were noted near the Stowaway Motel.

**Turnstone, *Arenaria interpres***

27/3/74: Along the high water line at high tide 12 were counted in Kanokupolu; 3 were in summer plumage.

25/3/74: One on the mud flats at Nuku'alofa.

**Bar-tailed Godwit, *Limosa lapponica***

27/3/74: Kanokupolu, two in winter plumage feeding in shallow water.

26/4/74: On mud flats near Stowaway Motel, Vava'u, two were seen feeding; they were still in winter plumage.

**Reef Heron, *Demigretta sacra***

The Reef Heron is common both on Tongatapu and on Vava'u. The number of birds seen in different colour phases in Tongatapu were: grey: 6 (40%), white: 7 (47%), mottled 2 (13%). Mayr stated — grey 65% and only 20% white phase birds,

Grey Duck, *Anas superciliosa*

One observation only of a duck flying along the lagoon behind Nuku'alofa on 28 March.

Banded Rail, *Rallus philippensis*

This species which is very abundant in Western Samoa was not often observed in Tonga. Along 16 km of road on 24 March only one was seen. On 25 March only two were observed during half a day's driving.

On 25 April three were watched while feeding among detritus on the beach and reef on Vava'u close to the Stowaway Motel. One was seen on 26 April in Vava'u amongst plantations.

Crimson-crowned Fruit Dove, *Ptilinopus porphyraceus*

A few observed on Tongatapu and on Vava'u.

Pacific Pigeon, *Ducula pacifica*

One seen while driving along the road towards Kanokupolu on 27 March.

Long-tailed Cuckoo, *Eudynamis taitensis*

One seen on 26 April flying across the road between plantations.

White-rumped Swiftlet, *Collocalia spodiopygia*

Common both on Tongatapu and Vava'u.

White-collared Kingfisher, *Halcyon chloris*

Mayr (1945) noted that the Tongan subspecies *sacra* Gmelin is very blue above. I made this same remark in my field notes. This species is quite abundant both in Tongatapu and in Vava'u and seems more common than *Halcyon recurvirostris* in Western Samoa. I even saw it in the garden of Beach House in Nuku'alofa.

On 24 March one was seen in wing and tail moult in Tongatapu.

On 25 April one was fishing on the reef in Vava'u. Its tail was moulting.

Polynesian Triller, *Lalage maculosa*

This species is abundant in the villages of Tongatapu and Vava'u.

Red-vented Bulbul, *Pycnonotus cafer*

This species is not mentioned by Mayr (1945) as occurring in Tonga. Now it is abundant all over Tongatapu but was not seen in Vava'u.

On 23 March most birds seen close by were in full moult. They appear to moult at the same time as in Western Samoa from my own observations.

Wattled Honeyeater, *Foulehaio carunculata*

This species does not seem to be very common in Tongatapu as it is in Western Samoa.

Polynesian Starling, *Aplonis tabuensis*

Common both in Tongatapu and in Vava'u.

### European Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*

This introduced species was often seen feeding on lawns in Nuku'alofa and perching in all kinds of trees. On 28 March a group of several hundred was seen at the airport.

#### LITERATURE CITED

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*The Life of Birds* by J. C. Welty, 2nd edition, reviewed in the last issue of *Notornis*, is readily available from: N. M. Peryer Ltd, P.O. Box 833, Christchurch; price \$16.65.

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### BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE PEREGRINE

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is compiling a bibliography with abstracts of English language literature, both books and periodical, on the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*). Authors who wish to have their articles included in this work should send two reprints, copies, or abstracts to the senior author, Dr Richard D. Porter, I.F. & R.E.S. Shrub Lab, 735 North 500 East, Provo, Utah 84601, U.S.A.

Articles in which the Peregrine Falcon is mentioned but is not the main subject, and articles in foreign languages with English summaries are also wanted.