

## NOTES ON THE PRESENT STATUS OF SAMOAN BIRDS.

By J. C. Yaldwyn, Wellington.

The following are notes on the more obvious birds seen during a visit to Western Samoa from December, 1950, to January, 1951. These two months were spent mostly as the guest of Mr. A. R. Cobcroft, of Vaipoto Plantation, Upolu. Trips were made in the company of Mr. D. V. Cobcroft, who also supplied me with records from Vaipoto, to many parts of Upolu and to one coast of the island of Savai'i.

Bird observations were very difficult during this period as it was at the height of the rainy season with rain falling every day—just over 11 inches were recorded on Christmas Day at Vaipoto. Notes have been written only on those birds which were definitely identified and as I was unable to identify most of the passerine birds which were seen only for brief moments in the rain, I have made no mention of these.

The Samoan name of each bird is given after the scientific as in most cases this is the only name by which the bird is known in Samoa. The only book available on Samoan birds is Armstrong, J. S., 1932, "Hand-list to the Birds of Samoa," London. As there seem to be very few copies of this essential work in New Zealand, I have repeated some of the observations recorded in the hope that they may be useful to future workers.

Other works used are:—Mayr, E., "Birds of the South-west Pacific," New York, 1945; Oliver, W. R. B., "New Zealand Birds," Wellington, 1930; Schultz, Dr. E., "Proverbial Expressions of the Samoans," J.P.S., Vol. 58 and following numbers.

White-tailed Tropic Bird (*Phaethon lepturus*), Tava'e.—About twenty seen flying about the tops of high trees on edge of a new clearing at Saleimua, Upolu, on January 3, 1951. Whether these were nesting or not I cannot say. Armstrong mentions nesting in holes in trees high above the ground and gives as date October, at Vailima, Upolu, but Oliver gives for red-tailed tropic-bird, eggs between December and May in Kermadec Group. D.V.C. says they are often seen over Vaipoto and are more common than the red-tailed. The Samoans use the long tail feathers of both the white and red-tailed species for ornamental purposes and have two proverbs which show their interest in these feathers. (Schultz, 119, 120.)

Red-tailed Tropic-bird (*Phaethon rubricauda*), Tava'e'ula or Tava'-etoto.—None seen during my stay, but D.V.C. has seen them over Vaipoto but not often. Armstrong reports only one, so apparently they are not common. He also records the common tropic-bird (*P. aethereus*). Mayr, however, does not include it in his list of S.-W. Pacific birds, and it is one of those that he says do not occur in Samoa.

Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*).—Three seen at dusk flying over the ship the day before arrival at Suva, Fiji, 10/12/50.

Reef Heron (*Demigretta s. sacra*), Matu'u.—A pair seen on the beach at Mulifanua, Upolu, 26/12/50. Reported as generally distributed on both islands.

Grey Duck (*Anas superciliosa pelewensis*), Toloa.—They are reported as widespread but not common throughout Upolu, and are present on Vaipoto. Neither Armstrong nor Mayr record them on Savai'i, but I have seen them on the freshwater lagoon at Safune, on 7/1/51, and they are reported as occurring in other localities. They are highly prized as food by the Samoans, whose hunting of them keeps the numbers down locally. The shooting season is from July 1 to December 31.

Bush Fowl (*Gallus gallus*), Moa'aivao.—These were brought to Samoa by the Polynesians in a semidomesticated state and have since become wild and spread throughout both islands. They are constantly receiving new blood from domesticated birds of the Samoans; their plumage is very variable, a pure white bird being shot on Vaipoto while I was there. Though common, they are very secretive and seldom seen. (D.V.C.) An excellent account of the spread of the bush fowl by Polynesians is given in Ball, S. C.,

"Jungle Fowls from Pacific Islands," Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin 108, 1933.

Banded Rail (*Rallus philippensis goodsoni*), Ve'a.—Very commonly seen between Vaipoto and Lepea; reported as common on both islands; when disturbed it is said to fly fast and low. (D.V.C.) Schultz records an old proverb which shows that this rail was formerly hunted on a large scale with bows and arrows.

Swamp Hen (*Porphyrio porphyrio samoensis*), Manuali'i or Manusa.—One seen, river bank, Vaipouli, Savai'i, 5/1/51. Generally distributed throughout both islands, especially in plantations, taro swamps and on river banks; does extensive damage to the young taro crop and is commonly shot for food by the Samoans. (D.V.C.) The shooting season is from July 1 to December 31.

Fairy Tern (*Gygis alba*), Manu Sina.—Many seen over reef and open sea between Upolu and Savai'i, 4/1/51.

Pacific Pigeon (*Ducula pacifica*), Lupe.—This and the following are the commonest pigeons in Samoa. Very often seen eating the fruit of the moso'oi tree. This is considered the best pigeon to eat by the Samoans, but all are shot for food, and as a protective measure a shooting season for all pigeons, except the tooth-billed, which is absolutely protected, has been introduced. The season is from July 1 to December 31. The large number of proverbs that deal with pigeon hunting given by Schultz tend to show the importance of these birds in the Samoan food supply.

White-throated Pigeon (*Columba vitiensis castaneiceps*), Fiaui.—Very common on Savai'i and Upolu, but not found in Eastern Samoa. Very difficult to distinguish from *D. pacifica* when seen in the tree tops against the sky.

Samoa Tooth-billed Pigeon (*Didunculus strigirostris*), Manumea.—This interesting pigeon is found only on Savai'i and Upolu, and is reported as not being as common as it was. Seen in bush on Vaipoto plantation (D.V.C.). This pigeon is now absolutely protected. Armstrong told the writer that a young one was being kept in Apia during January, 1951.

Crimson-crowned Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus porphyraceus fasciatus*), Manutangi (young Manufili).—Very common all over the Samoan Islands. Often seen on Vaipoto. (D.V.C.)

Samoa Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus perousii*), Manuma (female Manulua). Recorded from all the islands of the Samoan Group. Not very common on Vaipoto, where it seems to prefer the fruit of the moso'oi tree. (D.V.C.)

Samoa Ground Dove (*Gallicolumba stairii*), Tu (male, Tutautifa; female and young, Tu'aimeo).—Restricted to Savai'i and Upolu. This brown dove appears to be rare; occasionally seen on the ground at Vaipoto. (D.V.C.)

Samoa Blue Lory (*Vini australis*), Senga Samoa.—This is the only parrot native to Samoa; the Samoans, however, keep other species as pets. The blue lory is common on plantations especially among coconuts, on whose flowers they feed as well as on those of other trees. Seen on both Savai'i and Upolu. (D.V.C.)

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba lulu*), Lulu.—One seen several times on Vaipoto. Reported as often taking chickens and rats on plantations. (D.V.C.)

Swiftlet (*Collocalia s. spodiopygia*), Pe'ape'a.—Common on both Upolu and Savai'i, their flight is unmistakable. Reported to nest in caves and lava tunnels. The Tongan subspecies *C. s. townsendi* was seen in large numbers in caves in Vava'u Harbour, Tonga, 16/12/50.

Western Samoan Kingfisher (*Halcyon recurvirostris*), Ti'otala.—Often seen on road between Apia and Vaipoto. Reported to catch worms, insects and lizards (D.V.C.) This kingfisher is restricted to the islands of Upolu and Savai'i (Western Samoa), and is not found in Eastern or American Samoa which is only about 70 miles away. There, two subspecies of the widespread *H. chloris* are found. In fact, Eastern Samoa is the limit of its

range to the east. Why *H. chloris* does not occur in Western Samoa is not known.

Samoan Starling (*Aplonis atrifusca*), Fuia—I saw many shot and eaten by Samoans at Vaipouli, Savai'i. Reported to be widespread in the plantations and bush throughout Upolu and Savai'i.

Samoan Fantail (*Rhipidura nebulosa*), Se'u.—These birds are very tame and are common in the bush on both islands. The Savai'i birds (*R. n. altera*) are said to differ from the Upolu birds (*R. n. nebulosa*) in being "somewhat lighter," but the difference does not appear noticeable in the field.

These notes have been written in the hope that they may act as a basis for a comprehensive account of Samoan birds under present conditions.

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## BREEDING HABITS OF SILVEREYE.

By W. H. Davidson, Dunedin.

On January 12, 1950, a silvereye's nest containing three eggs was found in a black currant bush, 3ft. from the ground. On January 14, at 2.30 p.m., the nest contained two chicks and an unhatched egg. The next day the third chick had hatched. The adult birds always approached the nest through the back of the currant bush, perched on a branch about a foot from the nest for a few seconds, then landed on the edge of the nest. It was always on the same place on the edge of the nest that the landing was made, with the result that there was a flat area on the far side of the nest from the camera.

The hen had a poor ring round her eyes. It was not white, but inclined to be dark and very ragged as if it were moulting. She had a smaller, finer beak than that of her mate, and she always sat on the nest facing the camera and looking with both eyes. The male was a little larger and he was well-groomed, with clean-cut features and with bright white eye rings. He sat with his head to the left and watched with one eye.

On January 19 pin feathers were developing on the wings of the young and their bodies were becoming covered with dark down. The nest was gradually canting to one side. When the hen was on the nest, at a given call from her mate, she flew off. Immediately her mate arrived with a beakful of insects, which were fed to one chick. He then settled down on the nest. The hen gave the signal "tweet," and he at once departed. She landed, fed a chick and settled on the nest. This procedure went on continuously. Each bird sat and waited for a signal "tweet," and flew off at once, the other bird landing within a second. At no time were two at the nest at once except on one occasion when a bird missed the signal, but it left the nest immediately the other arrived. Sometimes they cleaned the nest, larger droppings being dropped over the edge of the nest, smaller ones carried to a near branch which was covered with droppings. The interval spent in the nest was from half a minute to about two minutes. Insects and green caterpillars were the standard diet of the young.

On January 22, the eyes of the young were opening. They had green feathers on their backs but their heads were still bare. The two bigger youngsters seemed to be sitting on top of the third bird. The parents were now tame. By January 24 the eyes of the young were wide open and they were fully feathered except for a little bare patch on the top of the head and around the eye. They filled the nest and usually one of them had a wing over the side. On the rare occasions that an adult sat on the nest, it could not cover the young. On this date raspberries were given to the young. The adults seemed more timid about approaching the nest when the observer was near. One side of the nest was at least 2 inches lower than the other.