

BIRDS OF GUAM

BY JOHN J. STOPHLET

IN view of the fact that very little information is available on the birds of the islands of the Pacific, the author presents a list of birds observed on Guam, Marianas Islands, between September 19 and December 12, 1945. As my time and opportunities for observing birds was limited and as large sections of the wilder parts of the island were closed to military personnel, I was forced to carry on observations for the most part in the more settled region of the south-central areas. Field work was conducted on the west side of the island in the foothills and mountains in the vicinity of Mt. Tenjo, along the Masso River (a small stream), the Orote Peninsula, Apra Harbor, and the beaches northeast of the last locality mentioned. Two trips were made to the forests near Point Ritidan (the extreme northern tip of the island), and two trips along the south-east coast as far south as Talofofo Bay. One trip was taken along the west coast south of the Orote Peninsula.

Guam lies north of the equator in latitude 13° 30' N., longitude 145° E. It is the largest of the islands in the Marianas group and is approximately thirty miles long and from four to eight miles wide. The southern part is mountainous (the highest elevation, according to an old map, is 1,334 feet on Mt. Lamlam), while the northern part is an elevated plateau, approximately four hundred feet in height. High cliffs, covered with vegetation for the most part, flank the plateau along the coasts. In the central part of the island and along most of the coast are extensive coconut plantations. Marshes and swamps are few; two partially drained areas were found.

The high temperature and the rich volcanic soils produce a luxuriant tropical vegetation. The northern plateau is largely covered by heavy forest including such characteristic plants as pandan or screw-pine (*Pandanus*), cycads (*Cycas*), wild figs (*Ficus*), and a bewildering array of other trees, shrubs, and vines. Extensive grasslands clothe large portions of the southern mountains, especially in the Mt. Tenjo area. There are several streams in this section whose headwaters start as springs in the mountains and form cascades over the cliffs. The mountain stream valleys are, for the most part, without forest except isolated scrub vegetation such as screw-pine, hau (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*), low palms, and an occasional clump of coconut palms (*Cocos nucifera*). A tall cane grass forms thick growths along the streams and springs in the mountains. Australian-pine (*Casuar-*

ina equisetifolia) grows scattered throughout this area. Wild breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*) is found abundantly in all parts of the island.

During my short stay on the island, I found no bad effects from DDT on the bird life. However, the drainage of the few swamps and marshes by the military government will certainly affect the survival possibilities of the Marianas Mallard (*Anas oustaleti* Salvadori), Guam Rail¹ (*Rallus owstoni* Rothschild), and other marsh birds. Fortunately there are large areas of thick 'jungle' in the northern part of the island and the mountains to the south where birds may live in greater or lesser freedom from human interference.

Birds observed fall roughly into three groups: resident land birds, migrants from Asia (shorebirds and a few others), and seabirds. The following were not definitely identified as to species: a Man-o'-War Bird (*Fregata*) seen on November 28; two falcons (*Falco*), a small light-throated one on November 7, and a large bird presumed to be a Duck Hawk on the 16th; a dotterel (*Charadrius*) on October 20; and swallows (*Hirundo*), one on October 28 and six on November 16.

I was unable to collect specimens. The nomenclature followed is from 'Birds of the Southwest Pacific' (1945), by Ernst Mayr.

Acknowledgments are made to William Anderson, Lawrence H. Walkinshaw, Josselyn Van Tyne, and particularly Ernst Mayr, for their helpful suggestions and criticism of the paper.

LIST OF SPECIES

WHITE-TAILED TROPIC-BIRD (*Phaëthon lepturus*).—One adult seen on November 13 about the cliffs on the west side of the Orote Peninsula. It flew toward the cliffs and apparently alighted there, for it was not seen again. This was the only tropic-bird that I observed in this part of the Pacific.

REEF HERON (*Demigretta s. sacra*).—This is one of the characteristic birds of the beaches. It was found about Apra Harbor, north of that locality, and on the southeast coast. These herons were confined to the beaches except on two occasions when two white individuals were seen in wet pasture lands, directly back of the beach. A mottled bird and one in the gray phase were observed feeding near the mouth of a stream, several yards from the beach. The maximum number of birds observed during one day was ten, on November 7, on the southeast coast. Of the ten birds observed, five were white, four gray, and a single bird was in the mottled phase. The majority of the birds were feeding about the coral outcrop of the beach. A total

¹ The Guam Rail is not uncommon in the scrubby grasslands of the islands, according to recent observers, and may well be able to survive the drainage of the swamps.—En.

of 32 birds was seen. Of these, 21 were white, ten gray, and one was in the mottled phase. The mottled bird was entirely white, except for small dark markings on the head and neck.

CHINESE LEAST BITTERN (*Ixobrychus sinensis*).—This common little heron was found in an amazing variety of habitats throughout the island. It was seen along the inland streams and coast as well as in the forested area of the northern part of the island. On October 27 two were observed in the northern forested area—one along a woods road, the other flushed from the ground beneath a prostrate tree in a large area of felled forest. In the high hills about Mt. Tenjo, one was flushed from a thick stand of saw grass on November 6. On November 19, two were seen flying above the scrub forest on the Orote Peninsula. The maximum number seen at one time was six, on November 27, in a marsh east of Apra Harbor. One was observed to alight in a coconut palm on December 12. Apparently the majority of the birds were migrants.

PIGMY QUAIL (*Excalfactoria chinensis*).—This diminutive quail has been introduced onto Guam from the Philippines and is confined to the grasslands of the southern part of the island. Few were found, but possibly others were overlooked. The majority observed were in the vicinity of streams in the foothills. On September 24, two were flushed from tall grass and weeds on a stream bank. On repeated days, pairs and single birds were found about the same places along this particular stream; undoubtedly they were the same individuals. One was flushed from a sparse growth of short grass and weeds in the mountains on October 14. A pair was seen on an open soil area under the floor of a tent, on November 6.

GUAM RAIL (*Rallus owstoni*).—Only one of this species was observed. On November 27, one was seen in second growth on the edge of a large marsh east of Apra Harbor.

GALLINULE (*Gallinula chloropus*).—Four were seen in an open, grassy pond area on a marsh, east of Apra Harbor, on December 3; others were heard in the vicinity.

PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER (*Pluvialis dominica fulva*).—The commonest shorebird observed. It was found in all suitable habitats including the grasslands of the mountains. In the grasslands it occurred about open soil and short-grass areas. It was found singly and in groups up to nine individuals. It was first seen on October 4 when two birds were observed near a stream in the foothills. The largest group seen together was nine, including a melanistic individual (bird entirely black as far as I could tell), in wet pasture lands on the

west coast, on November 16. The total number seen was 68. Of these, 25 were found on upland grasslands, 17 on coastal mudflats, 13 on marsh and wet pasture, 12 on sand beaches, and one on rocky beach.

WHIMBREL (*Numenius phaeopus variegatus*).—This large, noisy curlew was first observed on October 14 when seven were found in approximately a mile of muddy beach where they were feeding on fiddler crabs. They ran the animals down, probed the burrows, and brought the crabs to the surface and swallowed them. Apparently the crabs were swallowed alive. Later observations showed the birds feeding extensively on the crabs along this particular beach. The birds were widely scattered and were seen mostly singly and in pairs. A total of 29 were seen—nineteen on mudflats, seven on rocky beaches, two on sandy beaches, and one in a field directly back of the beach.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica baueri*).—One was seen feeding, on mudflats north of Apra Harbor on October 20.

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleucos*).—One was seen on the rocky beach north of Apra Harbor on October 14. This bird has the characteristic 'teetering' and flight of our Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*).

WANDERING TATTLER (*Heteroscelus incanus*).—One was seen on mudflats north of Apra Harbor on October 14, and two near the same place on the 20th. On November 7, two were observed on a rocky beach and one at the mouth of a stream near the beach on the southeast coast.

TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*).—A flock of 11 was observed on November 7 on a rocky beach on the southeast coast.

MARSH SNIPE (*Gallinago megala*).—One was flushed from an area of short grass in the mountains on October 21. Three birds were observed in a marsh east of Apra Harbor on December 3.

FAIRY TERN (*Gygis alba*).—Observed mostly in groups of two and three along the coasts; occasionally, however, inland about the hill valleys. On October 14, on the west coast, six were seen flying about and alighting in breadfruit trees (*Artocarpus altilis*). On November 3, four were seen at the same place.

NODDY TERN (*Anous* sp.).—On November 24, four Noddy Terns were seen near the cliffs on the Orote Peninsula; dark-colored seabirds, thought to be Noddies, were seen occasionally about the cliffs, but were too far away for positive identification. On December 13, as our ship passed the tip of the Orote Peninsula, approximately 200 seabirds flushed from the cliffs; I feel positive these were Noddy Terns. There is a possibility they were nesting on the cliffs.

MARIANAS FRUIT DOVE (*Ptilinopus roseicapillus*).—One was seen in the forest and fresh specimens were examined on October 27 near Point Ritidan; others were heard in the forest. On November 24, one was observed in scrub forest on the edge of cliffs on the Orote Peninsula. Three birds were observed in the forest near Point Ritidan on November 28. As others were heard in the surrounding forest, these doves may be more common than one imagines.

PHILIPPINE TURTLE DOVE (*Streptopelia bitorquata dusumieri*).—This dove, introduced from the Philippines, is very common in the open country of the southern part of the island and is occasionally seen in the northern forested area. On October 27, four were seen in a large clearing in the northern forest. A bird was observed in scrub forest, carrying nesting material, on November 13. The largest flock observed at one time was six, on November 6.

WHITE-THROATED GROUND DOVE (*Gallinolumba xanthonura*).—This dove seems to be fairly well distributed throughout the partially open country of the south-central part of the island but is nowhere common. On October 21, one female was seen in scrub forest in the mountains near Mt. Tenjo, and on the 27th five males and two females were observed in trees in a large area of felled forest near Point Ritidan. A male was seen along the Masso River on the 29th. On November 7 a male was seen about a coconut grove on the southeast coast. On the Orote Peninsula the following were observed: two males in scrub forest November 13; a pair flying about the cliffs on the 19th; a male in the same place on the 22nd; and four males and a female near the same locality on the 24th. A female was observed in a breadfruit tree, picking at the under side of a leaf on November 27; it was presumed to be eating insects. On the 28th one was seen at Point Ritidan, and two others in the mountains. These doves were never observed on the ground but were perched in low trees.

EDIBLE NEST SWIFTLET (*Collocalia inexpectata*).—Swifts were seen occasionally, usually in pairs, in the southern part of the island. The largest concentration observed comprised approximately 50 birds, on October 21, at the base of Mt. Tenjo. They were feeding over the grassland and scattered clumps of trees. On November 19 they were common in the forested area near Point Ritidan.

MICRONESIAN KINGFISHER (*Halcyon cinnamomina*).—Kingfishers were found to be uncommon. One male was seen in an area of scrub forest along a stream in the grasslands, on October 9. Four were observed in a group of fig trees on Cabras Island, Apra Harbor, on October 23, and a male was seen near the same place on the 29th.

On October 27, six were seen—two males and two females at the edge of forest, near Point Ritidan; and a pair in a coconut grove at Tumon Bay. On November 7, two males were observed on the southeast coast—one in scrub forest and the other along a stream, in a coconut grove. On the 28th, one was perched in a tree in the forest near Point Ritidan, eating a grasshopper.

NIGHTINGALE REED WARBLER (*Acrocephalus luscini*).—Only two birds of this rare species were observed. One was seen and heard singing from a clump of low trees along a stream in the grasslands from September 20 to 24. This particular bird was extremely wild, and every time it saw me it flew wildly away to a near-by thicket. The song is loud and clear, reminding me somewhat of that of our Mockingbird (*Mimus p. polyglottos*). On October 29, one was seen in the lowlands along the Masso River, east of Apra Harbor, in a thick growth of cane grass and shrubbery. Mayr says of the bird: "Nearly extinct in the southern Marianas" (*Birds of the Southwest Pacific*: 295, 1945).

RUFIOUS-FRONTED FANTAIL (*Rhipidura rufifrons*).—This flycatcher was not found to be numerous in the southern part of the island, but from reliable information I have received, it is said to be very common in the forests near Point Ritidan, in the northern part. From September 21 to October 9, birds were found singly and in pairs about the area of scrub forest along the streams in the grasslands. On September 23, one was observed with tail spread, flitting about a shrub, picking insects from the branches. On October 17, a pair was feeding about a tree, occasionally flying out after insects. Four were seen in scrub forest on the Orote Peninsula on November 22.

MICRONESIAN BROADBILL (*Myiagra oceanica*).—A pair of these flycatchers was found building a nest on September 20. The nest was placed about seven feet above the ground near the end of a horizontal branch of a hau (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*), in a partially cleared area of low trees along a stream in the grasslands. It was cup-shaped like a vireo's nest and composed of coarse plant fibers with a few cobwebs on the outside and lined with fine rootlets. The nest was completed about October 4, but apparently the pair deserted it soon after. On October 11, four individuals were seen in thick growth in the lowlands along the Masso River. Two males were observed in shrubbery along a road on the southeast coast on November 7. On the 28th, a male and two females were found at the edge of forest near Point Ritidan. The song of the male is a melodious note of three syllables, like *peter-peter-peter*.

MICRONESIAN STARLING (*Aplonis opacus*).—The most common species found on the island. Observed everywhere in the more wooded country, and occasionally in flocks of eight or ten about the areas of scrub forest in the grasslands of the mountains. A streaked young out of the nest was seen along the Masso River on October 11, and one near the same place on the 26th.

GUAM CROW (*Corvus kubaryi*).—More often observed in the forested regions than the open country. On October 27, four were seen in the forests near Point Ritidan, and about a dozen were seen and heard there on November 28. On the southeast coast, three were found in a coconut grove, one flying over the road and one in the forest, on November 7. On the 16th, one was seen passing over the mountains. The call is an extremely high-pitched *caw*, given in a series, if I remember correctly, usually of two or three notes. The call sounds to me more like the scream of a parrot than that of a crow.

CARDINAL HONEY-EATER (*Myzomela cardinalis*).—These birds were much in evidence in various parts of the island visited by me. Four were found in the grasslands on September 23; one was observed probing the white flowers of a shrub. On October 9 a pair with two young were flushed from low shrubs and grass along a stream. The female returned and performed the 'injury-feigning' act; with spread tail and quivering wings she called while hopping about on a branch close to the ground. The young, as far as I could tell, were dark-colored and had yellow bills. On October 11, five were seen along the Masso River. A pair was observed feeding about the branches of a tree, apparently after insects; one of the birds was probing the yellow flowers of a tree and the other the flowers of a shrub. Approximately ten were seen in the partially open country of the west side of the island on November 16. A male was observed probing a morning-glory blossom (*Convolvulaceae*) in company with a brown-colored young. The birds have a melodious song.

BRIDLED WHITE-EYE (*Zosterops conspicillata*).—On the grasslands of the foothills, these birds were usually observed in groups of two or three from September 20 to October 9. A pair was feeding a young bird out of the nest in a thicket on October 9. The immature bird was lighter green above and lighter yellow below than the parents, with a bright orange-red bill. On October 27, six were seen on the edge of forest near Point Ritidan, and seven at the same locality on November 28.

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