

The Noisy Birds of Canton Island

By E. H. Bryan, Jr.
Continued from May

The general color of the adult is white, with patches of sooty-brown on the wings and tail. They have a length of 25 to 29 inches. The mask-like face and large, conical, pointed bill are bluish or olive; the feet are brownish-gray. The young birds are grayish-brown above and white below. The food consists of flying-fish, which are swallowed whole. Back at the nest, the young inserts its head into the parents' mouth and throat to receive the partly digested fish, disgorged into its mouth.

Also abundant is the Red-footed Booby, *Sula sula rubripes*, found in several large colonies, especially toward the southeast end of the island. The nests are never on the ground, always perched on a bush or in the branches of a tree. The nest is a crude platform of twigs and leaves. Only one egg is laid, its pale blue color overlaid with chalky white. Both parents take turns sitting on it, and vociferously will attack anything which approaches.

The adult is a little smaller and more slender than the Blue-faced Booby, with a smaller, light blue bill (not over 3½ inches long). The color is white with a buffy tinge on the head and neck. The wings are marked with brown or hoary-gray, and the tail is pure white. The feet are bright red. The young are sooty-brown above, smoky-gray below, but they may be recognized by their red feet and white tail.

The Brown-vested Booby, *Sula leucogaster plotus*, is less common than the other two. It is a trifle larger than either and is quite distinctive in color. All the upper parts are a uniform deep sooty brown, lower parts white below a distinct line across the breast, as if the bird had on a brown cutaway coat and white pants. The bill and skin around the eyes form a greenish-blue mask. The feet are a delicate pale green, pinkish-flesh color in the young. Young birds are brownish-gray, their upper parts distinctly darker, where the adults are brown. The nests are built of twigs, either on the ground or on low bushes. Two bluish-white eggs, with a chalky outer layer, are laid.

The Red-tailed Tropic or Bos'n bird is fairly abundant throughout the island. It nests by preference under a tilted slab of coral sandstone. Lacking this it finds a secluded spot beneath a bush or bunchgrass. The single, dirty-white egg, spotted with liver-brown, is brooded over by both parents, in turn, crouched with wings slightly open. It is noisy when disturbed, but will give up the pair of long slender crimson and black tail feathers, with a squawk, rather than leave the nest. It is graceful on the wing, flying long distances to sea in search of pelagic fish and squid, for which it plunges. Not counting the long tail feathers the length is about 18 inches. The whole plumage is silky white, with a tinge of rose, and a few black spots. The bill is scarlet and about two and a half inches long. The young are



Red-Footed Booby—Bishop Museum

brownish-gray, becoming white with many black bars and spots. The scientific name is *Phaethon rubricauda*. nostrils.

Four species of shearwaters and petrels have been reported from Canton, but these are so seldom seen that only a word of description is necessary. All may be recognized by their short hooked bill and pair of tubular nostrils.

The Wedge-tailed Shearwater, *Puffinus pacificus chlororhynchus*, is dark chocolate-brown above, white or grayish-brown beneath. Length is about 15 to 18 inches. The tail is strongly wedge-shaped. They live in pairs, characteristically nesting in burrows in the sand, where one white, thin-shelled egg is laid on a rude nest of grass. At night they utter a low, moaning cry. They are expert fliers, going to sea for fish.

The Christmas Island Shearwater *Puffinus nativitatis*, is a little smaller, all chocolate-brown. Its tail is also wedge-shaped. It lays its pure white, oval egg in crevices of coral rock, in the midst of a pile of rough coral blocks, or even under fallen coconut husks, in which situation one pair was found by Major Buddle. They croon at dusk and morn.

The Dusky Shearwater, *Puffinus lherminieri dichrous*, is less than a foot long, slaty or brownish-black above, underparts white, the sides of the breast bluish-gray. It makes its nest in a burrow in the sand.

The Phoenix Petrel, *Pterodroma alba*, also called *Pterodroma parvirostris*, is of medium size (length about 15 inches). It is sooty black above, light below, with a dark band across the upper breast; flanks mottled with brown, and tail wedge-shaped. The white egg is placed on the ground under the tangled branches of low bushes, almost with no nest. Here one can find the newly hatched chick, covered with dark gray down.

Eight species of terns have been reported from Canton.

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