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# → POINT COUNTERPOINT ←

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## **Hawaii and the American Birding Association**

At its 1990 convention, the American Birding Association will vote on a proposal to change the Bylaws and add the state of Hawaii to the ABA Checklist Area. As the author of a recent field guide that covers Hawaii's birds, and as the promoter of the proposed Bylaws amendment, I am obviously in favor of admitting Hawaii to the birding union. In the following discussion, I set forth the many reasons why I believe this to be a wise course, and I try to refute those arguments that have been put forth against the amendment. Many of the latter were listed in a prototype edition of the new ABA newsletter *Winging It* (September 1988).

The original ABA Checklist Area coincided with the area covered by the 1957 American Ornithologists' Union Check-list. It was upon this geographic area that such pre-ABA birding traditions as the "600 Club" had been based. This area had always been more or less arbitrary, and in 1983 the AOU expanded its coverage to include all of North America, the West Indies, and the Hawaiian Islands. The new AOU Area has both political and geographic integrity but more than doubles the number of species covered. Obviously, birders could not completely abandon their older boundaries, because to do

so would disrupt most traditional birding goals. Thus the new AOU Area became a separate listing category.

Because the border between the United States and Mexico forms our southern boundary, the ABA Area is politically defined. As it now stands, it includes all of one country (Canada) and parts of another (United States of America). Many of us believe the ABA Area should at least have the political integrity that follows national borders.

In retrospect, we can see that the exclusion of Hawaii from the 1957 AOU Check-list Area, and hence the ABA Area, was primarily the result of unfortunate timing. Hawaii became a state in 1959 and was added to the AOU Check-list Area at the next (1983) major revision. For the ABA, however, Hawaii fell through the cracks. Hawaii is thus alone among the 50 states in not being included in any regional listing category other than the AOU Area (which is of little use to those of us who maintain lists for the U.S. and Canada). Thus, in the listing game, a Eurasian Wigeon seen in Seattle is "worth more" than one seen in Hawaii because it is countable on a birder's ABA, AOU, Lower Forty-eight, and Washington lists, whereas the Hawaiian bird counts only for the

**GEOGRAPHIC ORIGIN OF HAWAII'S  
LAND AND FRESHWATER BIRDS**

	Nearctic	Holarctic	Cosmopolitan	Australian	Palaearctic
waterfowl (3) <sup>1</sup>	1	1 or 2 <sup>2</sup>			
herons (1)	1				
hawks (1)	1				
Rallidae (4)	1		2 or 3		
shorebirds	1				
owls	1				
crows (1)			1		
monarchs (1)				1	
Old World					
Warblers (1)					1
thrushes (5)	1				
honeyeaters (5)				1 or 2	
Hawaiian honey- creepers (28)		1			

<sup>1</sup> Number of historic species given in parentheses (based on *A Field Guide to the Birds of Hawaii and the Tropical Pacific*).

<sup>2</sup> Alternatives indicate that exact number of colonizations not certainly known.

Hawaii and AOU categories. This fact has been a major disincentive for mainland birders to visit the 50th state.

The lack of interest in Hawaiian birds on the part of mainland birders has had several unfortunate consequences. Most importantly, the amount of attention and funding given by the Federal government to endangered species in the islands has been disproportionately small, despite the fact that over half of the birds so listed for the United States are found only in Hawaii. How many mainlanders are even aware that the Hawaiian Crow has quietly followed the fate of the California Condor? Because of limited publicity and funding, the crow has declined to near extinction in the wild, and its fate now largely depends on the success of controversial attempts to capture recently located wild birds to bolster the reproductive success of the ten highly inbred and aging

captives. If mainland birders had been regularly observing the Hawaiian Crow since the mid 1970s, its decline would have been more obvious and efforts to save it might have been started much sooner. The crow is but one example among many.

Another reason that national politicians have paid little attention to the plight of Hawaiian birds is an unfortunate and, to me, very disturbing division among the ranks of those of us interested in bird conservation. Over the years I have noted that many birders and conservationists who live in Hawaii are deeply suspicious of the motives of mainland birders. I have heard some misguided extremists compare listers to ecological scourges such as feral pigs—a lawless horde trampling down the last native forests to add a few birds to our lists! Such attitudes are based on rumor, distortion, and misconception that more frequent contact and communication would quickly dispel. Both communities are poorer for the lack of such interaction, but, more important, Hawaii's endangered species suffer from the disension.

The argument that rare birds are better off if birders do not try to see them does not hold up to close scrutiny. Hawaiian rarities (i.e., the ultra-rare species such as Olomao, Nukupuu, and Bishop's Oo) are comparable in status to the Eskimo Curlew—occasionally observed but almost never staked out for repeat observations. Thus, the opportunity for harassment by birders almost never exists. Indeed, the only information about such birds'

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movements may come from birders, and, from a management perspective, the more sightings the better. Furthermore, rarities in Hawaii are found in such remote and physically demanding places that only the most intrepid birders will even attempt to find them, and those who do should not be discouraged.

Probably the most substantive, but also the most demonstrably mistaken, argument against including Hawaii's birds in the ABA Area is the idea that the Hawaiian avifauna is unrelated to that of North America. Even if true, this belief would not be relevant to the present controversy because, as pointed out earlier, the ABA Area is only defined politically, not zoogeographically. Nevertheless, because the issue has been raised, and because the claim is so preposterous, I shall address it here.

As early as 1943, the noted ornithologist Ernst Mayr (*Condor* 45:45-48) showed that the Hawaiian avifauna was primarily of North American origin. Relationships of some groups had not been adequately researched at the time, but subsequent findings have only reinforced Mayr's contention that Hawaiian birds should be regarded as an extension of the Nearctic avifauna. I do not know the origin of the idea that Hawaiian birds are largely unrelated to North American ones, but perhaps it results from a misunderstanding of how such affinities are determined. A common error results from using modern species totals to determine the relative prominence of various elements of the avifauna. Because several avian colonizers

of the Hawaiian Islands gave rise to numerous species through the evolutionary process known as adaptive radiation, modern species totals can be very misleading. The five species of thrushes, four of oos, and 28 of Hawaiian honeycreepers represent, zoogeographically, only three individual elements of the avifauna. In other words, they are the descendents of only three successful colonizations. The table lists the land and freshwater birds known historically from the islands and gives their probable geographic origin. (Note that recently discovered fossil birds from Hawaii mostly belong to groups represented by modern species or to groups with cosmopolitan distributions and thus do not alter our perceptions of the avifauna's affinities.)

The table shows that the Palearctic Realm (temperate Eurasia) is represented by only one element (the Millerbird, an *Acrocephalus* warbler), and the Australian Realm by only two or three. The latter are the Elepaio, a monarchine flycatcher with close relatives on other remote Pacific islands, and two endemic genera of honeyeaters (family Meliphagidae), possibly the result of two separate colonizations, with no close continental relatives.

Endemic species that belong to cosmopolitan (i.e., worldwide) genera can be considered neutral in this context because their exact geographic origin will likely never be known. In a few cases, however, a close relationship to a particular mainland species can be determined, and these do provide useful information. Thus the two native rails, the Hawaiian

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Crow, and the Hawaiian subspecies of Common Moorhen could have originated almost anywhere, but the Hawaiian population of Black-crowned Night-Heron even belongs to the same subspecies as birds in western North America.

The Holarctic Realm is a designation that combines the Palearctic and Nearctic faunas into a single temperate northern-hemisphere category. As most birders are aware, even though North America and northern Eurasia each have distinctive bird groups, they share many, even at the species level. Hawaiian birds of Holarctic origin, such as the two Mallard-related ducks (i.e., Hawaiian and Laysan Ducks), could have come from either continent. The most important holarctic element is the group known as Hawaiian honeycreepers (Drepanidinae). They are believed to be related either to the cardueline finches (siskins, redpolls, crossbills, etc.) or the Emberizidae (buntings, tanagers, etc.), both of which are well represented in North America. The ancestor of the honeycreepers probably colonized the islands via a chain of islands, now represented by the Emperor Seamounts, that stretched northward to the Aleutians, at a time when the present larger Hawaiian islands had not yet emerged from the sea. Thus, they may well have their closest relatives in North America.

Other native Hawaiian birds that have undisputed North American ties include the Hawaiian Coot, closely related to the American Coot; the Nene or Hawaiian Goose, a member of an endemic genus related to *Branta*; the Ha-

waiian Hawk, a *Buteo* believed related to Swainson's Hawk; a Hawaiian subspecies of Black-necked Stilt; a subspecies of Short-eared Owl very similar to the western North American form; and the native thrushes, whose closest mainland relative is Townsend's Solitaire.

To summarize, the ancestry of Hawaii's birds includes one Palearctic element, three Australian elements, seven certain North American elements, two possible or probable North American elements, and three cosmopolitan elements. Certainly, Hawaii is, like western Alaska, southeastern Arizona, southern Texas, and southern Florida, a peripheral or transitional area that includes incursions from adjacent zoogeographic realms. But the North American component is clearly the dominant one. That is more than can be said for Attu!

The North American connection is also clearly shown by migratory patterns. All shorebirds and ducks that migrate to Hawaii come from the north, mostly from North America. As in western Alaska, a few Old World species show up to make things interesting. The only birds that visit the islands from the south are seabirds migrating north during the austral winter, mostly the same species that visit the West Coast of North America. Hawaii would add only six migratory seabird species to the ABA Checklist.

Another concern among those opposing inclusion of Hawaii in the ABA Area is the presence in the islands of so many introduced birds (about 16% of the state list). In my opinion, this objection is spurious. Hawaii's native avifauna

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should not be ignored because misguided people introduced alien species. Should we exclude South Florida for the same reason? Those who wish to ignore introduced species may do so in Hawaii the same as elsewhere, so what is the problem? On the positive side, Hawaii's experience with introduced birds could be very instructive for our organization. The ABA's rather arbitrary period of 10 years to establish "countability" for exotics might well have been longer if we had been aware that several species have become "established" in Hawaii for 25 years or longer, only to die out eventually. Perhaps the inclusion of Hawaii would prompt a reassessment of our criteria for counting introduced populations. In any case, the presence of the alien species should not make Hawaii a birding pariah.

A final objection to the inclusion of Hawaii is the rather self-serving complaint that the islands are far away and thus expensive to visit, and include areas such as the islands of Nihoa and, Laysan, that are difficult for birders to visit. Since when have such concerns been considered criteria for excluding areas from the checklist? Just as no one is required to visit Attu, no one will have to go to Hawaii if it is added to the checklist area. The "Lower Forty-eight" category will still exist. Furthermore, those concerned about travel costs should realize that cost is relative to where one lives on the mainland. For West Coast birders, a weekend jaunt to Oahu to see a Ruff would be no more costly or difficult than a trip to Bombay Hook,

Delaware, to see the same species. The outer Aleutians are farther away, more expensive to visit, and more logistically difficult to reach than the main Hawaiian Islands. The essentially Asiatic island of Attu is further west than Kure Atoll, the farthest flung of the northwest Hawaiian Islands, and was equally difficult to visit until birders took an interest in it. Perhaps Kure can become the Attu of Hawaii.

Like Attu, Kure has a small Coast Guard Station and an airstrip but no regular air service or other public access. Few birders have had the opportunity to visit during migration periods, but those who have visited have turned up such rarities as Eurasian Dotterel, Little Stint, Pintailed Snipe, Slaty-backed Gull, Eurasian Skylark (one of the Asiatic subspecies), Barn Swallow, Red-throated Pipit, Water Pipit, Savannah Sparrow, Snow Bunting, and Common Redpoll. In autumn 1983, Peter Pyle observed a flock of 12 to 15 Olive Tree-Pipits on Kure for at least a week. Obviously, Kure Atoll is a world-class migrant trap.

So what would the ABA Checklist look like with Hawaii added? Would the list be swamped with new species? In fact, the list would gain only 77 living species (plus 15 that are extinct), including 38 indigenous birds and 33 introduced ones. The balance of the Hawaii list (now nearly 300 species) are already included in the ABA Checklist but are not countable if seen in Hawaii. Thus, the "600 Club" will still represent a significant birding challenge. However, Hawaii would broaden our horizons by giving us an al-

ternative to those expensive and difficult Alaska trips that anyone in pursuit of 700 species ultimately must now make. Let us end the longstanding discrimination against Hawaiian birding and at the same time provide ourselves with a checklist area that at least makes political sense. Let's add Hawaii!

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**No to Hawaii (. . . or, "I love you, baby, but it wouldn't work out")**

Let me start by saying that I am a great admirer of Doug Pratt, having had the opportunity to work with him and learn from him. Furthermore, I would love to go to Hawaii (my interest largely spurred by Doug's writing and art), and, given the chance, I would bird the islands feverishly. Still, I do not agree that Hawaii should be added to the ABA Checklist Area.

First, I am not persuaded that a checklist area has to have political integrity, nor am I exactly certain what political integrity is. For obvious reasons, any listing area has to have boundaries, and political ones are a good place to start, but there are a lot of adjustments and exceptions. Common sense requires them. For example, do birds seen on the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon go on one's France list? Do birds seen in Greenland go on one's Denmark list? How about birds seen on Guam or Puerto Rico? What about the political integrity of such locations? Obviously these areas are exceptions to the rule of political integrity. They don't prove much by themselves, except that

we are already making exceptions.

Guam and Puerto Rico? "But they aren't states," you say. True, but someday they might well become states, and then what? Following Doug's rules, we would have to add them. The fact is that Doug equates U.S. political integrity with the fifty states, a reasonable definition but not the only possibility.

I can't buy the notion that one reason we should add Hawaii is because local birders and conservationists mistrust the motives of mainland birders and that further contact might reduce such tensions. First, I seriously doubt that adding Hawaii will result in a mass influx of mainland birders to Hawaii, and the overwhelming percentage of those that do go as a result will be listers. Throughout his argument, Doug continually makes comparisons with Attu Island, Alaska. If the comparison is valid, then we have to assume that the same list lust that drives people to Attu will drive them to Hawaii. That is not, I think, the way to ease the concerns of local birders about the comparison between listers and feral pigs—"ecological scourges" in Doug's words.

More important, although I assume everyone is in favor of reducing tensions throughout the world, I don't see this as an argument for expanding the checklist area. If that is the goal, let's add a real tension spot—say, Cuba.

A number of Doug's arguments seem counterproductive. He points out that many of the Hawaiian endemics are almost impossible to stake out, that they are largely inaccessible, and that

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there aren't very many of them. These are reasons for adding Hawaii? If there are so few birds, if they are so hard to get to, and if they will affect everyone's list so little, why bother?

Now we get to the question of zoogeographic affinities of Hawaiian birds. I'm not crazy enough to argue with Doug about the origins of the birds. He probably knows as much about it as anyone in the world. What I don't understand is what difference it makes. On the basis of zoogeographic affinities, there are a lot of places that make more sense as additions to the checklist area. How about Baja California? Or Mexico? Or the Bahamas? The relationship between Hawaiian birds and the North American avifauna is fascinating, but it doesn't have anything whatsoever to do with the question at hand.

I am a little uncertain about one aspect of Doug's argument in favor of North American origin for the Hawaiian honeycreepers. He points out that they may have island-hopped from the Aleutians to Hawaii by way of a series of islands now under the Pacific. These islands, visible on maps of the Pacific floor as the Emperor Seamounts, point, however, to an area about equidistant between Attu and Kamchatka, suggesting that *if* they were the means by which the honeycreeper ancestors arrived in Hawaii, the birds may just as easily have originated in Asia. Even if we take the most charitable view, that the origin was the western Aleutians, it does not prove, or even argue strongly for, North American origin. After all, most of the birds on the western Aleutians are Asian.

If affinity is an argument for inclusion in the ABA Checklist Area, Attu clearly does not belong.

I do not, like some people, object to Hawaii on the grounds that it is overrun with introduced birds and is in fact on its way to becoming an open-air zoo. I do think, however, that the increasing ratio of introduced to native species will steadily erode the number of birders willing to travel there. Rightly or wrongly, most birders are biased against introduced species. How many ABA members would be willing to shell out the dollars to go and see and list such species as Erckel's Francolin, Common Peafowl, Red-crested Cardinal, Common Myna, Yellow-fronted Canary, Saffron Finch, Common Waxbill, Red-checked Cordonbleu, and Nutmeg Mannikin?

As for Doug's argument that adding Hawaii might result in a modification of the ABA's "Ten-Year Rule"—we don't need to make it part of the checklist to benefit from the experience.

Should we add Hawaii? No, but not principally for the reasons listed above.

First, there is the question of cost and distance. Attu is bad enough; adding Hawaii adds significantly to the problem. Doug's consistent comparison between the two places seems to me to be a better argument for deleting Attu than adding Hawaii. Attu has already limited competitive listing to a very small cadre. The logistics and expense have guaranteed that no more than a dozen birders have any chance of *ever* being in the top group. It has moved the totals of the top listers

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to a stratospheric level that is beyond the wildest dreams of 99.9% of birders. Hawaii would just put us further in the hole. For mainlanders it is another expensive outpost that offers an occasional vagrant. I realize that there is no way to narrow the gap between the haves and the have-nots in the listing community, but it seems silly to exacerbate it needlessly. We already have a growing number of members who are fed up with listing stories from remote areas. Let's not make it worse.

In the final analysis, listing is what this argument boils down to. We are not talking about righting some great injustice. We are not being petitioned by Hawaiian birders to let them "join the union." We are talking about doing this solely for the benefit of mainland birders who want to add a few species to their ABA list and for the tour leaders who will shepherd some of them from native to exotic and back again. The core argument for adding Hawaii is just as valid, and just as invalid, for adding Greenland, the West Indies, or Baja.

Remember, listing is just a game, and I admit it is a pretty good game. But games have rules, rules established by the organizers. The rules are largely immune to arguments about affinities, geography, and improving communications. They are not immune to questions of fairness, logistics, common sense, and tradition. Doug's arguments are entirely about the first set of criteria, but they ignore the compelling realities of the second set.

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## Longspur Call Notes

Longspurs present a consistent identification problem, and females and immatures can be especially trying. Picking out a particular species from a mixed flock or from a group of hurtling Horned Larks (*Eremophila alpestris*) can be frustrating. The following focuses only on the call note differences of longspurs. Such differences are useful both in corroborating an identification based on plumage and in alerting an observer to the possible presence of a species before it is seen.

On the breeding grounds, three of the four species are known to give distinctive flight songs, but Smith's (*Calcarius pictus*) sings only from a perch. The other three also seem to have a more varied repertoire of notes in summer, carrying on a certain degree of "conversational chatter."

Chestnut-collared Longspur (*C. ornatus*) typically gives the most distinctive flight call, a finch-like *kittle* (sometimes shortened to *kip*) or *kittle-kittle*, which is very different from the dry rattles of the other three. This species, however, also gives a soft or weak rattle, usually when in large flocks or on the breeding grounds. Observers should therefore *not* assume that such a rattle heard from a flock of Chestnut-collareds necessarily indicates the presence of another longspur species.

Lapland Longspur (*C. lapponicus*) gives a dry rattle (typically composed of three or four individual notes strung together) that is irregularly interspersed with single *tew* notes. The *tew* notes are distinctive to this