



Reading Handout: Ka'ena Point



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Ka-ena Point

By Evi Meyer

A couple of months ago my husband David and I went to Oahu Island in Hawaii. I had heard about the Laysan Albatross nesting site at Ka'ena Point at the northwestern tip of Oahu.

Our flight from Los Angeles arrived at noon in sunny Honolulu, and we immediately rented a car and headed out. We had about an hour drive to our destination. Before long we experienced the rain the north side of the island was famous for. As we drove up to where the paved road ended and parked our car, a drizzle had become full-blown rain.

There was still about an hour walk on a very muddy coastal trail to reach the nesting site, but I was determined to see those birds. David's desire to get out of the car was slim and I told him to just stay put and enjoy the view of the rain and waves pounding on each other from behind the windshield. He graciously agreed to wait and let me go.

I strapped on my camera and binoculars and waterproofed them with a dry sack. I put on my hiking boots and rain jacket and headed out. This was a very remote part of the island, and I seemed to be the only person crazy enough to brave this trail. As I was slogging through the terrain, my shoes were rapidly getting heavy with mud. The trail was slippery, and it was difficult to keep my balance with each step. But I was not going to give up easily. I continued for about half an hour walking in absolute solitude with a steep mountain cliff to my left and waves crashing to my right. I was beginning to have doubts. What was I doing here? I was not even sure I would have seen the nesting site, as I only had a vague idea of where it was.

But then I saw the silhouettes of two people walking on the same trail way ahead of me. I picked up speed and soon joined up with them. They were just as soaked as I was, and they also had binoculars and cameras with them. That was a really good sign. I struck up a



Laysan Albatrosses show their bills as part of their courtship. Photo by Evi Meyer

conversation and learned that they were two wildlife biologists, a professor and his student. They were both pelagic bird specialists and were on the island for a birding conference. Of course they were on their way to visit the Laysan Albatross nesting site. My doubts disappeared and I felt incredibly happy that I had stuck it out and met up with these interesting people who were very willing to share their knowledge.

We continued to walk and talk for about half an hour. Just when we were approaching Ka'ena Point, the rain diminished into a drizzle and then the clouds disappeared and the sky turned blue. We opened up our rain jackets and dry sacks to make our equipment accessible in anticipation of the big birds. We were rewarded almost immediately with soaring Albatross right above us. As we continued on the trail, we walked past some birds displaying their courtship behavior and others already sitting on eggs, or in one case even a newly hatched chick. Apparently very young birds cannot thermoregulate yet and the mother actually sits on them to keep them warm. This of course also protects the chicks against any predators that might be lurking around.

For 20 minutes we were almost delirious with enjoyment of these gorgeous winged creatures. There were Laysan Albatross everywhere doing their best to ensure the success of the next generation. I was struck by a threesome of birds showing their bill fencing typical for courtship. I'd seen this kind of behavior displayed by Waved Albatross on the Galapagos Islands, but only two birds at a time. What were these birds up to?

Yet nothing lasts forever, and certainly not the blue sky on the north shore of Oahu. Rain clouds were blowing in again and we knew that we had to waterproof our equipment to avoid damage. So we packed up our stuff, closed up the rain jackets and said goodbye to the beautiful birds. We started our walk back, again through mud and rain, but this time with a beautiful experience engraved in our memory. We felt grateful that the sky had opened up for us just at the right time, so we could photograph the Laysan Albatross colony. Back at the car, I felt tired and dirty, but enormously satisfied. David was listening to music and just shook his head in disbelief of how stubborn I can be. He did enjoy the pictures, though.