

RECOLLECTION OF A FAMILY TRADITION - BIRD CATCHING¹

Dr. Isabella Aiona Abbott was interviewed by Dr. Will McClatchey, on the beach with *limu* (seaweed), to tell about her family's tradition of bird catching.

When she was age 5 or 6, her great-uncle (i.e., uncle on her mother's side), *Samuel Ka'ilihou*, took her up in the mountains behind Lahaina (on the island of Maui). He told her to be quiet on the way up. When they got to a grove of small 'ōhi'a lehua (*Metrosideros collina* ssp. *polymorpha*) trees, he looked for a branch where he could lift her up, and then enjoined her once more to be still, and not to move. About 10-15 minutes later, a bird sat on a branch above her head. He had earlier put something on the branch, and when the bird moved up to that spot; the bird was stuck. He lifted the bird up, and rubbed its feet with a cloth, and then let the bird go.

She asked him in Hawaiian what this was all about. Her uncle explained that his family were bird catchers. He wanted to show her how birds were caught. His family used to catch them for the feathers. This would be their *ho'okupu* (tribute, tax, or ceremonial gift-giving) for the chiefs. These feathers would be made into feather capes and leis during the *Makahiki* (the annual festival beginning about October and lasting for four months, with sports and religious festivities). Her great-uncle told her that she would never have to do this, since she are not a boy, but he wanted her to see how it is done.

He told her that there haven't been any bird catchers for about three generations. Her great-uncle later showed her the plant where he got the sticky stuff, *pāpala kēpau* (*Pisonia* spp.)². The bird was released by putting *kukui* nut oil (*Aleurites moluccana*) on a piece of cloth to take the goop off the bird's feet, so when it went somewhere else, it wouldn't get stuck there.

(5:39)

Study Questions:

1. How were birds caught for their feathers?
2. Were the birds killed or released? Why?
3. For what reason(s) were the birds caught?

¹ Notes by Al Keali'i Chock.

² The sap of 'ulu, breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*) also furnished 'bird lime.'