

A Tern Tale - From Fledgling to Flight

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I've never cared for birds. I think it began when I was a child. My family had a blue parakeet named Pogo. Pogo got along famously with my brother, sitting happily on his finger. When I put my hand out for him, however, he bit me. We were adversaries from then on. I think the incident scarred me emotionally for life regarding birds. (It was with some amusement that I learned of Pogo's demise shortly after he learned to say, "Here kitty." But I digress.)

When I first moved to Arcadia, some of the residents told me of a fairy tern chick nesting on a low branch in a tree behind the dining room, so in February I went out to see him (I will call it a "him" for convenience). When I saw the small, white ball of fluff sitting there, I was smitten with his adorable cuteness. I went to see him every morning thereafter, and one morning I was lucky enough to see the mother feed him a fish! I was startled and amazed at how

he simply downed the fish whole in one gulp. Well, okay, I didn't expect him to whip out a fork and knife, but still

During the time he spent on the place where he was hatched, he never once deviated from that spot. He would turn in a circle but would never set one foot to either side on the branch. The parents would come several times a day to feed him.



One day in mid-April, I was surprised to see he was no longer in his usual spot, but was on a smaller adjacent branch. I saw him fluttering from branch to branch. His mother would follow him wherever he went, I suppose to keep tabs on him. It was during this critical time when he was just learning to fly that Arcadia was scheduling tree trimming. I, along with several other residents (mahalo to Marilyn Bornhorst and Ted Trimmer), contacted both Chief Operating Officer Suzie Schulberg and Environmental Services Manager Albert Torres to alert them of the presence of the young tern. (The white fairy tern — or *Manu o Kū* — is a

threatened Hawaiian species protected by federal and state agencies.) Both Suzie and Albert informed me that the tern's tree would not be pruned until the juvenile was a mature adult who could be on his own. This was a tremendous relief, and I began a daily log of his activities so I could send them regular reports on his progress.

By late April, the young tern had relocated to one or two favorite horizontal branches on the 'Ewa side of the tree and was taking occasional daily short flights during the mornings, resting on his branch for the majority of the day, and waiting to be fed in the early evenings.

In early morning when all the terns were out doing their breathtaking aerial acrobatics, our young tern wasn't interested in joining in. He would fly off alone during the day, and his flights gradually became longer. Several times I saw another young tern sit next to him and groom him, but he never flew away with them. I was getting worried he might be a special needs tern!

By mid-May he was looking mature, with no brown on his back and a sleeker body with a longer beak. He took short flights in the morning and a flight of several hours in the afternoon. Still, his mom, and occasionally his dad, would come to feed him.



Gradually he was spending the majority of the day away from his tree, and eventually he was also away in the evenings.

One day at the end of May both his parents came with fish, but he was nowhere to be found. They waited four hours, until dark had fallen, and still junior was MIA. The next day, for the first time since he was hatched, they did not return to feed him. Junior had grown up at last and was on his own.

I was sad to see him go, but glad that he finally found his place in Ternworld as an adult, and often wonder if he occasionally returns to fly around Arcadia with the others who have called our area home. Bon voyage, Manu o Kū, and may you lead a long and fish-filled life!