

SHORT NOTE

Food of the Morepork in Taranaki

The diet of Moreporks (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*) has been the subject of attention from contributors to this journal (Cunningham 1948, Lindsay & Ordish 1964 and Saint-Girons *et al.* 1986). This note arises from observations on the gizzard contents of 19 Moreporks (7 male, 10 female and 2 of unknown sex) which were examined in dead birds deposited at the Taranaki Museum. Most of the birds were collected around human habitation outside the known breeding season, after they were struck by road vehicles, flew into windows or died of unknown causes.

Of the 154 invertebrate prey taken, 93 were moths (many *Porina*) in 9 birds; 17 were wetas in 8 birds and 20 were beetles in 5 birds. The remaining 24 prey items were made up of 6 cockroaches, 4 spiders, 4 katydids, 3 caterpillars, 2 stick insects, a harvestman and a chafer beetle and unidentified material.

Only 6 of the 160 prey items were vertebrates. One female (190 g) had the remains of three house mice; another female (180 g) had the remains of an unidentified small passerine. Each of the other two vertebrate prey, one a small rodent or bird and the other a house mouse, were found in female gizzards.

Other observers have pointed out that arthropods form the staple of this owl but these results point to some differences between the sexes in the diet. Such practices have the potential to benefit a species by partially removing competition between the sexes for food. Dietary difference between the sexes in birds is nothing new. Pierce & Maloney (1989) report it Harriers - a diurnal raptor. It has not previously been reported from Moreporks because cast pellets used in most studies cannot usually be tied to a sex.

From three birds, an undescribed cestode was collected and given to Peter Weekes of Victoria University. Paul Sagar is thanked for encouraging the submission to this journal and Ron Lambert for lending me the bird bodies.

LITERATURE CITED

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