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MARY H. POWLESLAND, 88 Maida Vale Road, Roseneath, Wellington



## SHORT NOTE

## A REPEAT NESTING OF BELLBIRDS

Over parts of the Marlborough Sounds, the land is rapidly regenerating from pasture back to bush. Kanuka (*Leptospermum ericoides*) is the main canopy tree in this second-growth association, and the most conspicuous native bird is the Bellbird (*Anthornis melanura*), especially from shoreline to 150 metres a.s.l.

On New Years Day 1981, I found a brood of five newly fledged Bellbirds at Arthur's Bay, Queen Charlotte Sound. I estimated that they had left the nest within the previous 24 to 48 hours. Their gapes were bright yellow, their tails were about 5 mm long and traces

of down still adhered to their heads and backs. All five were huddled together on one branch and my careless vibration of their perch made them scatter. However, within 30 minutes, all five were huddled together on a different perch. Both parents were feeding them and food which I saw passed consisted entirely of insects, mainly various Diptera and small cicadas.

From 5 January onwards, only the male parent fed the fledglings, and by 9 January all had grown noticeably larger and more venturesome, but they still uttered the begging call incessantly and towards late afternoon or evening all five would huddle together on one perch.

On 10 January the brood had moved about 50 metres up the hillside. They were actively foraging and feeding themselves but still kept within 30 metres of one another. The male parent was still feeding them, though much less frequently, and begging calls were much less frequent.

By 16 January, when my observations ceased, all five were almost adult size with full-length tails. In foraging and flying they were noticeably less competent than the male parent, who continued to provide each with an occasional meal.

During this 16-day period, the female parent had been far from idle. On 4 & 5 January, I noted both parents making frequent visits to a kanuka tree about 40 metres from the vicinity of the fledglings. On 6 January, I found the female collecting dried grass from the edge of a path. The new nest site was 3 metres up in a spindly but dense growth of kanuka, in the same tree that they had repeatedly visited the previous two days. By 8 January the nest appeared complete, and from the 9th onwards the female sat continuously. The male was a regular visitor to the nest, feeding the sitting female and copulating.

So far I have been unable to find any record of five for either clutch or brood size in Bellbirds, apart from a rather vague reference in Hutton & Drummond (1904, *Animals of New Zealand*) which mentions the clutch size as being 4 or 5. All other authorities give 3 or 4, or occasionally 2.

Stead (1932, *Life histories of New Zealand birds*) strongly implied the productivity of Bellbirds by stating, "They have an extended nesting season commencing in September and rear at least two broods a year." Almost certainly this female had built a new nest and was sitting hard 10 days after the earlier brood had left the nest. Allowing, say, 9 days for nest site selection and construction and 28 days for incubation and rearing, two broods could be fledged within about 70 days (2 months). Was the re-nesting which I saw the second, third or perhaps even fourth attempt at nesting by the pair for the summer?

S. C. SPARROW, 30 Gosset Street, Christchurch 1