

SHORT NOTES

AUSTRALIAN PELICAN (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*) IN KAIPARA HARBOUR

A pelican was present on Northern Wairoa River 23-28 August 1976. During this period it was watched by Barrie Searle, who lives at Te Kopuru, and also observed by C. D. & C. Clunie, R. A. Froggatt and A. T. Edgar. It was apparently adult; general plumage white, nape grey; wing and tail quills and lower back black, with no brownish tinge; bill yellowish, pouch pinkish.

The Northern Wairoa is tidal. Deep drainage channels have been cut through farmland on both sides of and at right angles to the river, opposite Te Kopuru and further south at Tatarariki. At the mouth of the channel opposite Te Kopuru there is a mud bank and a large fallen tree, both used by the bird as low tide roosts, on which it was frequently observed sleeping, with its head on its back. It was seen feeding in shallow water in the main river, swimming or walking with beak submerged, once with its wings spread, but most of its feeding was done up the drainage channels over the period of high tide.

While in Tatarariki channel it permitted close observation at about 20 m without apparent alarm but for most of its stay it appeared restless and wary, often swimming or flying up and down a 6 km stretch of river between Mititai and Tokatoka, or returning to its roost. On 26 August it was on its roost as the tide started to flow; the sound of trucks changing gear on a road some distance from the river caused it to stand alert. Ducks took no notice of it, or it of them; it appeared uneasy at the presence of Black-backed Gulls and was once put to flight by close approach of a Black Shag. It flew when disturbed by a fisherman setting his net at the channel mouth and on another occasion made an extended flight at considerable altitude when disturbed by a motor boat. Take-off was rather laboured, flight easy and graceful with much soaring and gliding.

On 28 August, again disturbed by a passing boat, the pelican took off, gained height, soared and circled over the area for about 30 minutes till it was so high above the patchy clouds that it could only be seen through binoculars and when last seen appeared to be heading west.

On 2 September at Helensville (extreme south end of Kaipara harbour and about 70 km south of Te Kopuru) Mrs Rae Nicholls had her attention drawn to a pelican approaching from the north-west in a long circling glide, losing height till eventually it lowered its feet to splash down in the river behind some mangroves. Mrs Nicholls

has observed pelicans in Queensland and has no doubts about her identification; she was able to watch the bird swimming and feeding in the muddy shallows, for part of the time with its whole body submerged except for the curve of its back and its crown which showed above the water surface. This was her only sighting; though diligently searched for over the following days and weeks the bird was not seen again.

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AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR BY FEMALE BLACKBIRD

My suburban garden is bounded by a hedge, with a central gate opening on to a public footpath, on which children sometimes play. In 1976-77 season the garden was breeding territory for a pair of Blackbirds, which built three nests in the hedge. Nest material was being carried to an escallonia bush on 8 September 1976, the first egg was laid on 13 September, a clutch of four eggs was complete on the 16th and hatched on 28-29 September; the chicks were fed by both parents. On the morning of 6 October the nest was empty, probably the result of cat predation; only one dead chick was found.

Building of the second nest started on 9 October in a privet bush on the other side of the gate. Two eggs had been laid by 0745 hours on 14 October; the full clutch of five was confirmed on the 19th and hatched on 29 October. On 5 November the hen was seen on the nest with her wings spread to shield the chicks from heavy rain; the chicks left the nest on 12 November.

The hen had shown no signs of undue alarm during my inspections of the first nest or of the second nest up to 6 November; but on the evening of the 9th when I attempted to check the nest contents (chicks then 11 days old) she attacked, striking me a sharp blow on the right shoulder. After the attack she landed on the concrete path, scolding me, and followed me round the house till I went inside. Later the same evening when outside to the other end of the section she was perched in a cherry tree and again started to "buzz" me till I went inside. At midday on 10 November when I walked along the path past the nest she flew towards me from a perch on a power line across the road and at 1245 hours when I looked at the nest on my way back to work she attacked, striking me on the head behind my right ear. She displayed no hostility to other members of the family, but up to the evening of 12 November when the chicks left the nest, my presence near the nest or even showing myself at a window overlooking the garden produced signs of aggression. Unfortunately I had to pass the nest site at least four times each day. The male bird showed no aggression and the hen ignored me after the chicks had left the nest.