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October, 1950

# Notornis

*In continuation of New Zealand Bird Notes.*



*Bulletin of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand.  
Published Quarterly.*

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## Bulletin of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand.

Edited by R. H. D. STIDOLPH, 114 Cole Street, Masterton.

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## GODWIT INQUIRY.

The Ornithological Society has decided to conduct an inquiry into the status of the bar-tailed godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) in New Zealand. Members are invited to participate in this inquiry which may continue over several years and offers scope for investigation on a long-term project. As interim reports will be published at least annually, those participating are requested to reply at once to the organiser of the project, R. H. D. Stidolph, 114 Cole Street, Masterton.

Information is desired of the type of habitat, numbers of birds in winter and summer, any fluctuations in numbers, arrival and departure dates covering spring or autumn movements, food, plumage (i.e., number of red-breasted birds) and particulars of other waders associating with godwits, or other information of interest.

CLASSIFIED NOTES will appear in the January issue; material should be in the hands of the Editor not later than October 15.

## RECORDS OF HUDSONIAN CURLEW IN N.Z.

By H. R. McKenzie, Clevedon.

To begin with a summary, a space of seventy-five years separates the first and second records in New Zealand of the Hudsonian curlew—the American subspecies of whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*). The first was a specimen shot by S. C. Liardet at some time before July 25, 1874. The second was found on Ohiwa Harbour, Bay of Plenty, as recorded below, when I was bird observing with a fellow-member of our Society, P. H. Basley.

The name "Hudsonian curlew" is American. The British subspecies is the whimbrel (*N. p. phaeopus*), and the American bird could also be called a whimbrel. Authorities vary as to its specific status: thus Bent ("Life Histories of North American Shore Birds, Order Limicolae," part 2, p. 113), gives its full specific rank as *Numenius hudsonicus*, Latham; Peters ("Check-list of Birds of the World," Vol. 2, p. 261), Witherby et al ("Handbook of British Birds," Vol. 4, p. 176), and Peterson ("A Field Guide to the Eastern Land and Water Birds," p. 89) list it as *Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus* Latham, making it of equal rank with *N. p. phaeopus* and other subspecies. One of these, the Eastern Asiatic whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus variegatus* (Scopoli) is the one which occurs most frequently in New Zealand, as explained below. Reference might also be made to the bristle-thighed curlew, *Numenius tahitiensis* (Gmelin), which winters in the Pacific, and is superficially at least little different from these subspecies of *N. phaeopus*. For clarity I will refer to the two New Zealand birds as *N. p. hudsonicus* and *N. p. variegatus*, and not by the vernacular names.

The breeding range of *N. p. hudsonicus* is from the north Alaskan coast eastward to Mackenzie and across to Fort Churchill on Hudson Bay. The migration south begins in early July, according to Bent, and the first birds arrive at Chile in mid-August. The winter range (northern hemisphere winter) is along the Pacific coast from southern California to Chiloe Island, Chile, on the Galapagos Archipelago and along the Atlantic coast from British Guiana to the mouth of the Amazon (Peters and Bent). The fact that it has occurred at least twice in New Zealand now makes it possible that its range is greater than has been believed. It is hardly likely these birds have crossed over from South America: more probably they have come with other migrants via Hawaii and the other Pacific Islands which are situated more or less in line between Alaska and New Zealand. In this case there is a further possibility that this bird may yet be found in the Pacific Islands; and more will probably be observed in New Zealand from time to time. The increasing activity in bird-watching in this country is already revealing the occurrence of quite a few rare birds which have previously been missed owing to lack of observers, especially in the North Island.

It may be suggested also that the occurrence of Hudsonian godwit, *Limosa haemastica* Linn., wandering tattler (*Heteroscelus incanus incanus*) (Gmelin), as well as *Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*, points to a bird line from Alaska to New Zealand, a slim one, perhaps, but one which may yet bring us the bristle-thighed curlew (*Numenius tahitiensis*) and others not yet seen here. A possible alternative is that these birds, together with others observed here in small numbers for some time, may breed in Siberia as well as in Alaska, and could thus become absorbed in the migratory stream of godwit and knot which come down to us by the westerly route. The grey plover (*Squatarola squatarola*) Linnaeus ("black-bellied plover" in America) has been found recently in New Zealand by R. B. Sibson ("N.Z. Bird Notes, Vol. 3, No. 4, p. 82, and Vol. 3, No. 8, p. 208). It could reach here by either route as it is known to breed in certain localities all round the Arctic. The case of *N. p. hudsonicus* is perhaps in favour of the Alaska to New Zealand route, as this sub-species has not yet, to my knowledge, been recorded in Australia. This applies also to the Hudsonian godwit, *L. haemastica*.

The identification in the field of *N. p. hudsonicus* is difficult. The wholly brownish upper surface contrasts with the pale (not white) blaze up the lower back to between the wings, characteristic of *N. p. variegatus*. This is very hard to see, so that failing a good view of the lower back it has been necessary in a number of cases to identify such whimbrel-like birds under the general heading *Numenius phaeopus*. The only occasions when this light back and rump marking can be seen are when the bird is making height after taking off, or exposing its back to view as it settles. The pale rump cannot be seen when it is flying level or when it is on the ground. In none of the *N. phaeopus* found in 1942 and 1948 at Miranda, by R. B. Sibson, had this character been seen clearly enough to be identified with certainty. Another bird seen in June and July, 1946, by Bull, Sibson and others at Puketutu, Manukau Harbour (R. B. Sibson, "Whimbrel in North Island," N.Z. Bird Notes, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 34) was possibly *N. p. hudsonicus*. However, although it was observed at close range it was doubtful whether the lower back was pale or dark.

In the article mentioned in the previous paragraph, E. G. Turbott mentions a whimbrel of the subspecies *N. p. variegatus* which came aboard a ship south of Lord Howe Island and was brought to Auckland on 14/9/42. It lived apparently happily at the Auckland Zoological Park for five years. Its skin is now at the Auckland War Memorial Museum. Those watched by D. A. Urquhart, at Karaka, on the Upper Manukau Harbour, from 1947 to 1950 have been recorded definitely as *N. p. variegatus*, as have also those watched over the same period by myself and others at Clevedon. These identifications have been checked further in all cases by R. B. Sibson. In the south of the North Island, R. H. D. Stidolph ("Whimbrel in the North Island," N.Z. Bird Notes, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 35) gives a description of a typical *N. p. variegatus* at Ohau River, Manawatu, on November 17 and 18, 1945. A bird recently observed at Petone by C. A. Fleming and later by R. A. Falla, was of this subspecies ("Asiatic Whimbrel at Petone," C. A. Fleming, Notornis, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 2).

Oliver, "New Zealand Birds," p. 314, up to the date of publication (1930) had only South Island mainland records under the heading "*Numenius phaeopus*." These were six in number, to which was added one from the Kermadec Islands. All of these had been shot.

With reference to his first record, that of the specimen shot by S. C. Liardet at the mouth of Wairau River, in 1874, Dr. Oliver has advised me that this is a specimen of *hudsonicus*, but that he had overlooked this identification when writing the book. The Dominion Museum register says of this specimen: "799. 21 December, 1874. Specimen of bird *Numenius femoralis* Peale. Shot by Liardet in Wairau. . . W. T. L. Travers." The label reads: "Purchased from Liardet 25th July, 1874," the specimen probably being collected not long before this date (see Buller's reference below in his paper read on February 10, 1875). Dr. Oliver also kindly informs me that this is the specimen referred to in two references by Buller: "Buller, W. L., Trans. N.Z. Inst., Vol. 7, p. 224, 1875. '*Numenius uropygialis* Gould. The first specimen to be noticed is an example of the Australian whimbrel, obtained a short time since by Mr. Liardet in the Wairau, and presented to the Museum by our vice-president, W. T. L. Travers, Esq., F.L.S.' Buller, W. L., Trans. N.Z. Inst., Vol. 25, p. 60, 1893: '*Numenius uropygialis* Gould. (The Australian whimbrel.) This species must be added to the New Zealand list. A specimen (now in the Colonial Museum) was shot by Mr. S. Liardet in the Wairau district, and was presented by Mr. W. T. L. Travers to the Museum. . . . Descriptions and measurements follow." Thus the first whimbrel recorded in New Zealand was *N. p. hudsonicus*.

The finding of the bird at Ohiva was not merely by chance. R. B. Sibson had coached me in looking out for odd whimbrels. This we had done ever since he and P. C. Bull had seen the doubtful one at Puketutu, mentioned above. With the help of Mr. E. G. Turbott, ornithologist at

the Auckland War Memorial Museum, we had studied and compared the skins of the respective species or subspecies. I already knew *N. p. variegatus* very well in the field, so I was prepared to identify *N. p. hudsonicus* should it appear. On this day, June 4, 1949, Mr. P. H. Basley and I had rowed a small boat for about nine miles in the western part of Ohiwa Harbour looking for black-fronted tern (*Chlidonias albigularis*) which had been reported in that area, when we came upon the whimbrel feeding alone at low tide on a firm bank beside the main western channel, and some distance N.-W. of Uretara Island. The bird rose at a much greater distance from us than *N. p. variegatus* would do in our experience. I had my glasses focussed on it and looked for any pale marking on the lower back, but saw none. We followed the bird and put it up several times, always distantly but in plain view, and neither of us could detect any light blaze on back or rump. The bird then became lost to us among the widely scattered feeding godwit. It did not seem to mix closely with the godwit, and was at times hotly pursued by two godwit at once. Although satisfied that we had found *N. p. hudsonicus*, we did not consider that we had enough evidence to report it as a certain identification. The next day, however, June 5, we set forth again, hoping to find the bird and obtain closer and better views. The search was at first fruitless and at high tide we anchored for lunch about 40 yards from a party of 144 godwit resting on a small shellbank. Our bird flew in and settled a few yards beyond the godwit. It was restless and presently rose. This time we had a perfect view of the whole of its upper surface as it was rising, then as it zigzagged to gain height, all the time with its back fully exposed. We both watched it, each with good binoculars, until it had flown right away. There was now no room for doubt. We were fully agreed that there was not a single light feather on it. No light pattern on the upper wing could be seen on this occasion. Had it been *N. tahitiensis* the cinnamon cream upper tail would easily have been noted.

Since this is a winter record, it gives added significance to the reading of the label on the skin of the 1874 bird: "Purchased from Liardet, 25 July, 1874." This bird may well have been taken in winter during or shortly before July.

On a further excursion, P. H. Basley and I found the bird again, presumably the same bird, on December 9, 1949, in the vicinity of a large flock of godwit on the sand area at the Ohiwa Heads. It was very restless and flew wildly about, calling much of the time, but giving us no opportunity to observe colour, though we could plainly see the down-curved bill. We returned on December 12, 1949, with another keen observer, Mr. Bernard Sladden, but the bird again acted restlessly. We were not able to obtain a clear view with our glasses so I used my 30x telescope, fortunately focussing as the bird began a long glide to settle beside the godwit pack. Its back was in view all the way and as it further extended its wings to settle there appeared on them a faint light godwit-like pattern, the upper tail, rump and back showing no light at all. Bent mentions a faint light wing marking of this kind, but Peterson ("A Field Guide to the Eastern Land and Water Birds," p. 90, pl. 25) in his sketch of the flying bird shows only a trace of it. From my experience I would say that in ordinary flight, as depicted by Peterson, the light pattern would not be visible in the field at a distance, but that it would be noticeable when the wings were extended beyond the requirements of ordinary flight, as in the extra effort of settling.

The call notes sounded to me the same as *N. p. variegatus*. Unfortunately, I have little skill in this respect and my companions had not heard the call of *N. p. variegatus*. The call was, therefore, of no value to us for separating the two.

Bent, in his very full account of the life history of *N. p. hudsonicus* lays particular stress on its natural wariness. To this he attributes its survival in America where similar species were slaughtered to extinction or near-extinction. The Ohiwa bird, we had learned to our cost, certainly had this characteristic. Much weary rowing, our athletic youth being

many years past, could almost have convinced us that this wariness was indeed a valuable identification means. Actually, I am sure that there is some value in this characteristic, as *N. p. variegatus* is without doubt very much more easily approached.

It is to be hoped that there will shortly be further opportunities in this country for other observers to study this fine bird. I cordially thank for assistance with notes and reference, Dr. W. R. B. Oliver, Messrs. E. G. Turbott, R. B. Sibson, P. C. Bull and C. A. Fleming. I am also deeply indebted to Mr. Turbott for a great deal of help with the manuscript.

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LANDING ON WEST KING.—I have recently returned from my sixth visit to the Three Kings and at last managed to land and spend five hours on the previously unexplored West King. As I was collecting snails and botanical specimens I did not have time to sit down and look for the different birds. And as is usually the case when moving rapidly through the bush, the bird life shifts away and is not observed. I did, however, see a number of bellbirds and red-fronted parakeets. It always seems to me that the parakeet on the Kings is a smaller bird than the ones on the Poor Knights and on the Alderman Islands. I found only one bellbird's nest, and a hollow tree where a parakeet had nested. The West King is a razor-back. One side is a 600ft. cliff and the other a steep bush-clad slope. Practically the whole of the soft soil on this slope is honey-combed with petrel burrows. I found one young fluttering shearwater but did not have time to investigate many burrows. Judging by the mixed variety of trees on the West King I should think that it would have a big population of land birds in addition to the thousands of petrels nesting there. On the highest point, which is 607 feet high, there is a colony of nesting red-billed gulls. I have never seen them nesting at this height before. The landing and climb up the West King was difficult and can only be undertaken under the most favourable conditions. The red-billed gulls are steadily increasing on the Great King and since the extermination of the goats some years ago, several new colonies can be observed nesting in the grass at the tops of cliffs. The gannets on the Princess Rocks show no difference in number, all available nesting places being occupied. On the South-West King there is a slight increase. Last year I first noticed an increase in gannets on the S.W. King and this year there is a still further increase of about 200 to 300 as far as I could judge. There were very few gannets fishing near the Kings. All the birds appeared to be going to and returning from the north-east so there was apparently little fishing for gannet at the Kings when I was there in January. In fact, from Auckland up to the Three Kings I did not see more than a few dozen gannets. The only bird life at sea between Auckland and the North Cape were thousands of prion. I saw several flocks in which I counted well over 100 birds. A few fluttering shearwaters and a few Buller shearwaters were also seen, but it was not until I was over 12 miles off the east coast that the two last-named were seen in any quantity. On my return trip, when within a few miles of Auckland harbour two sparrows flew into the cabin and took possession. They hopped around and inspected everything. They stayed aboard for over an hour and it was not until the yacht was moored and I was ready to go ashore that they departed.—Magnus E. Johnson, Auckland.

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BIRD TICKS—I would be very interested to see specimens of *Ixodes europytidis* the common tick on penguins round the N.Z. coast (little blue, white-flipped and crested). The males are especially desired and these are most likely to be found in the nests and not on the birds. Other bird hosts are cormorant (shag), black-fronted tern and red-billed gull. Specimens may be sent dry or in alcohol and should be addressed to Mr. L. J. Dumbleton, Entomological Research Station, Cawthron Institute, Nelson.—L. J. Dumbleton, Nelson.

## NOTES ON BREEDING OF VARIABLE OYSTERCATCHERS.

By D. H. Brathwaite, Napier.

During three visits to the Waikanae Estuary, in January and February, 1950, the writer and Messrs. F. E. Wilkin and J. S. Watson, of Wellington, observed the rearing of two young variable oystercatchers (*Haematopus reischeki*).

The parent birds differed in plumage, one being completely black and the other having a mottled abdomen and under wing coverts, and a narrow alar bar. This bird is shown in the bottom row of the accompanying sketch showing the field characteristics of *H. reischeki* and *H. finschi*. Minor differences in behaviour, as described below, suggested that the black bird was the male.

The parents were rarely close together, even when they were apparently unaware of our presence; this was particularly noticeable on the first two visits (January 7 and 11) when the chicks were still in down. On their being approached, the male was always the first to take wing, flying towards us and circling at a distance of about ten yards, piping continuously. Occasionally the female also did the same, particularly when we were near the chicks, but she mostly stayed on the ground, running around and occasionally sitting down. This latter behaviour puzzled us but a recent paper by Williamson (1950) suggests that it may have been a form of distraction display. This paper describes a form of distraction behaviour, known as "pseudo-sleeping," in which the birds stand, sometimes on one leg, with the bill tucked into the scapulars, as if asleep, but with the eyes open. Another form of distraction-behaviour observed by us seemed to be a form of "injury-feigning," in which the female bird flew round us, landed, and ran with a staggering gait, with wings raised above the back.

When unaware of human presence, the female kept close to the chicks and the male remained some distance off; the male was only once observed to actually approach a chick.

Both parents were very suspicious once they became aware of our presence, and even after we had concealed ourselves they refused to approach the chicks for up to thirty minutes. While they felt danger to be present both birds constantly uttered a piping "chillik-chillik" (sometimes a drawn-out "chille-e-ew") which seemed to be a signal to the chicks to remain concealed.

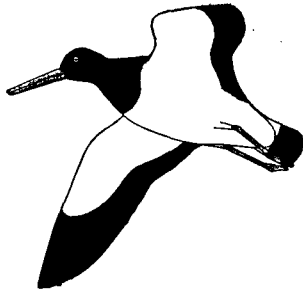
The birds were twice observed feeding, probing in the sand above high-water mark and in the shallow water's edge of the old river course, now a slow-flowing creek. It was also noticed that the male bird had a habit of sitting alongside a log or small piece of driftwood. As this was observed when we were concealed and the birds were unaware of our presence, the habit did not seem to have any relation to the sitting of the female, described above.

The downy chicks were brownish-grey in colour, almost perfectly matching the sand, with black markings and white under-parts. They were extremely difficult to find, and on January 7, although I located their approximate position before approaching, it took me about 45 minutes to find them. They lay motionless in the attitude illustrated by Falla (1939, Fig. 1) even when touched, although they struggled when picked up. One of them was replaced in its original position and "froze" again; the other was laid on its back for a photograph and, on being replaced, scuttled off across the sand at surprising speed until the male ran up and took charge of it. Although the chicks were never far apart, when "hiding" they were always separated sufficiently to necessitate searching for each individually.

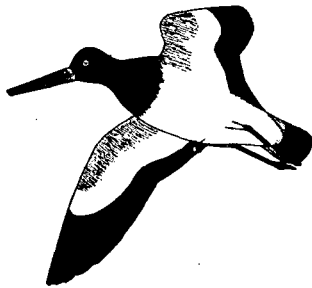
Although I was informed later that the chicks had actually hatched on January 1, I believe the date to have been at least ten days earlier. Not only did they appear markedly larger than those illustrated by Dr. Falla (1939, Fig. 2), but on January 2, when Mr. Wilkin and myself first saw them, there was no sign of an egg-tooth.



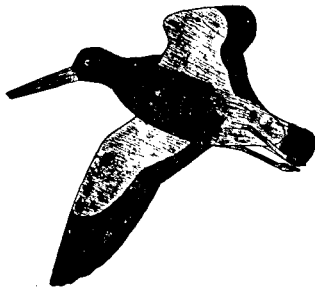
*Haematopus finschi*



*Haematopus reischeki*  
(Pied Phase)



*Haematopus reischeki*  
(Mottled Phase)



On the third visit (Feb. 11) the young birds were found to be fully fledged and flying. Both had much more white on the underparts than the female parent, and are illustrated in the middle row of the sketch. It will be noticed that, although the amount of white on the abdomen and breast approaches that found on *H. finschi*, the white on the back is confined to the rump, and the alar bar is little wider than that of the parent.

The plumage phases exhibited by the young birds is of interest as Falla (loc. cit.) describes the young of parents similar to the above, namely, a black male and a mottled female. In the one case, one chick had uniformly dark down and the other was white ventrally, in the other the fledged young were respectively all black and normal pied.



## REFERENCES.

- Falla, R. A.—Records of the Canterbury Museum, Vol. IV., pp. 259-266. New Zealand Oystercatchers.
- Williamson, K.—British Birds, Vol. XLIII., pp. 1-4. The Pseudo-sleeping Attitude of the Oystercatcher.

## NESTING OF NEW ZEALAND DOTTEREL.

By H. R. McKenzie, Clevedon.

The New Zealand dotterel (*Pluviorhynchus obscurus*) has only recently domiciled itself at Mataitai, a little to the east of the Wairoa (Clevedon) River mouth, in the Clevedon district. The first record was an isolated one of a single bird seen on April 19, 1942. No more appeared until 1948 and 1949, when a pair nested each year.

The 1948 nesting was not observed closely enough to obtain exact incubation and hatching-to-flying records, but notes referring to this year's nesting are:—

- 4/12/48.—One pair with empty nest. Female quite pale.  
5/12/48.—Bird sitting on nest. Seen from road by telescope at 350 yards.  
9/12/48.—Two eggs.  
6/1/49.—Seen from road sitting high on nest as if brooding chicks.  
9/1/49.—One tiny chick running and a dead one two feet from nest.

This evidence, though scanty, indicates a lengthy incubation period. The surviving chick was reared. This family, and a fourth bird, stayed right through to the spring of 1949.

### The 1949 Nesting.

- 14/8/49.—Two very well coloured birds, fussing, several sham nests.  
21/8/49.—Two red birds. All interest in nesting lost for time being. Two pale birds present.  
11/9/49.—Three red and four pale birds. Nest, 2 eggs, found by member L. H. Munro.  
14/9/49.—Nest now three eggs.  
18/9/49.—Six or seven birds. The other pale ones now colouring rapidly. The hen flew from the nest and chased a whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus variegatus*); one of two walking nearby.  
9/10/49.—Mr. H. A. Kemp, a resident, visited the nest daily from this date until the eggs were hatched.  
13/10/49.—6 p.m., one egg chipped.  
14/10/49.—10 a.m., two chicks had hatched.  
15/10/49.—7 a.m., third egg hatched. Chick very weak, apparently dying.  
23/10/49.—Four adults with two fine chicks out on tideflat.  
15/11/49.—Four adults and two chicks. The chicks now almost full-grown and well apart from adults. One was chased by Mr. M. Thorn, but it could not fly though now 31 days old.  
19/11/49.—One chick missing. Not seen again. One found about 200 yards from adults. When chased it fluttered just clear of the ground for about 10 yards. It hid in salicornia and allowed itself to be picked up.  
24/11/49.—The chick flew several times, low and straight, from 30 to 100 yards. Obviously it was not its first day for flying. I am assuming that it first flew on the 21/11/49. This is not quite satisfactory but cannot be far wrong.

The incubation period for the 1949 nest has thus been fairly well recorded, although it is unfortunate that the exact date on which incubation commenced was not ascertained. It is hoped to observe the birds again this year, but I suggest that it is reasonably safe to assume that the third egg was laid on 12/9/49 and that incubation would begin immediately on this date. Taking the hatching date as 14/10/49 the incubation period would thus be 32 days. If incubation began when two eggs had been laid, as is very probable with this species, the period would be 33 days.

The hatching-to-flying period is not quite definite but can be no more than one day out. This is 38 days.

I have not been able to obtain comparisons, as there seems to be no other detailed account of the breeding period of this bird.

From 15/11/49 to 27/12/49 the chick was nearly always found at a distance from the parents. It would keep very quiet while the parents fussed about an area where there was nothing to guard at all. This ruse is very effective and succeeded often.

The laying date for the 1949 nest should, I think, be the earliest record for the species. The first egg would be laid on either September 9 or 10.

I have specially to thank Mr. H. A. Kemp for his splendid work in traversing the mudflat for so many days and successfully observing the hatching. Also I thank members F. Murray, L. H. Munro, W. W. Renouf and D. E. Alexander for their assistance; also Mr. M. Thorn, who did some fine running in the later stages when testing the flying ability of the chick.

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## BREEDING PERSISTENCE IN BANDED DOTTEREL.

By E. W. de Lisle, Kaiaua.

I was shown the nest of a banded dotterel on October 12, 1947, close to my home at Kaiaua on the western shore of the Firth of Thames. The single egg was apparently newly laid because two others were later added. So tame were the birds that the female returned and sat on the nest only 27 yards in front of an occupied car. The male then put her off and sat on it himself. The nest was made in some loose shingle which at high tide had washed over into the short grass above the beach. Some beach cottages, occupied at weekends and on holidays, stood only 20 yards away, while cars and trucks frequently passed between the nest and the buildings.

In this situation there seemed little hope of success for this breeding pair. However, I resolved to assist them and I had a busy time keeping their area clear of picnic parties, playing children and frolicking dogs. Twice the nest was actually straddled by cars. The people occupying the beach cottages became keenly interested and assisted readily.

About two weeks had passed when a party of "Maori" horses came into the area. Two stallions fought, after which the victor chose the patch of shingle for a roll. In preparation for this he pawed the ground in the usual manner. I arrived breathlessly on the scene at this juncture and found that he had pawed the nest right away. I found one egg between two and three feet away and another between four and five feet away from the nest site. The third one I could not find. By a small thistle which had stood besides the nest I built up the shingle again and made a new nest in which I placed the eggs. I took the greatest pains to make the nest the same as the original and thought I had done it well.

The female quickly came up to the "nest" and looked at it critically. She dropped down into it and first with her bill and then with her breast pushed the eggs up onto the edge. She then filled in the nest somewhat, replaced the eggs with her bill and sat on them with apparent satisfaction. I had a full and clear view of this operation, using powerful binoculars from a short distance.

This incident greatly increased our sympathy and admiration for these lovely little birds and it was a great joy and relief when the eggs hatched, one on November 12, and the other on November 13. The fond parents moved with the tiny chicks to a safer area where I saw them frequently as they grew up. The devotion of these parents surely deserved this success.

## PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF BIRDS IN N.Z.—V.

### GANNET.

A fine study of a gannet in flight, taken at the Mahuki gannetry (see note below) by Dr. W. M. Hamilton, together with a general view of the colony is included in the photographic series in this issue (plates V. and VIII).

### KINGFISHER.

Male and female kingfishers (plates VI. and VII.) are featured in the latest contribution by Mr. K. V. Bigwood, of Christchurch. The male bird is depicted holding a crab in its bill and the female is perched momentarily at the entrance to its nesting hole, with a lizard.

**MAHUKI GANNETRY, Great Barrier.**—On January 5, 1950, Mahuki gannetry was revisited (see Vol 2, p. 128). The colony appeared to be in a thriving condition. A count showed 375 chicks in various stages of development and three eggs. A considerable number of birds took to the wing and did not settle while we remained in the vicinity. It was, therefore, not possible to make a count of the total birds in the colony.—W. M. Hamilton, Wellington.

**DISTRIBUTION OF WEKA.**—As regional organiser for the Auckland district I have sent the following circular to members in the Gisborne district. Members elsewhere who have information of interest regarding this bird are invited also to pass it on. The circular states: "The Society is interested in obtaining information on the North Island weka (*Gallirallus greyi*) in the Gisborne-East Coast area. It is known that wekas are subject to 'irruptions' in which whole populations leave one district for another (as is described by Guthrie-Smith in 'Tutira'). Apparently such a movement has taken place in the Gisborne area, where wekas have recently appeared. It will be greatly appreciated if you will make inquiries concerning the boundaries and numbers of this bird in your district, also of any noticeable increase or decrease since earlier times and any other details of interest. Please interest any friends who may care to help."—J. C. Davenport, Auckland.

**STILTS NESTING AT ARDMORE, 1948-49 and 1949-50.**—Pairs of stilts nested on my farm again in 1948 and 1949 but I was not so successful as in previous years in observing them. To the results given in "N.Z. Bird Notes," vol. 3, No. 4, p. 108, I can add only one further record from hatching to flying. Sept. 4, 1948: Found bird sitting on three eggs; 24th, egg chipped; 25th, chicks were hatched at 4 p.m.; Oct. 31st, one chick made first flight; Nov. 1, other two chicks flew; Nov. 30th, family left. For these chicks the periods from hatching to flying were 36, 37 and 37 days. This is longer than the average of previous observations. This family came back at intervals later, usually in spells of wet weather. In 1949 a pair made nests in July and August but did not use them. A third nest had three eggs which hatched on Sept. 11, but illness prevented my obtaining a record. The young birds were safely reared. The family of two adults and three chicks returned on 13/4/50 for a short visit.—A. F. Stokes, Ardmore, Papakura.

**NEST RECORDS INVESTIGATION.**—With a view to increasing our knowledge of breeding and incubation data, a nest records investigation is being undertaken by the Society. Members are invited to record their observations of all nests (in which eggs are laid) on cards which have been printed and are available to members. In order to collect as much information as possible, it is urged that members fill in cards for all nests of which they have records, for past as well as future years. The organisation of the investigation is being carried out by Mr. J. King, 124 Rensall Street, Masterton, to whom requests for cards should be made, and to whom completed cards should be sent. Postage should be sent with the requests.

## BIRD NOTES FROM LITTLE BARRIER.

By Elliot Watson Dawson, Christchurch.

During November and December of 1949 I spent several weeks on that "tapu isle of birds," the "Hauturu" of the old-time Maori, Little Barrier Island. This account of the bird life of the area primarily consists of my own observations together with notes and information supplied to me by Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Parkin, custodians of this ornithological paradise. I wish to express my sincere appreciation of the great help and co-operation given by Mr. and Mrs. Parkin, who spared no effort to help me. I had the added pleasure during my visit of the company of Miss Beatrice Brown, an English ornithologist, of Limpsfield, Surrey. I have to thank Dr. W. R. E. Oliver, Major Buddle and Mr. E. G. Turbott for giving me information pertaining to my trip. Notes on bird observation are:—

**Kiwi (*Apteryx australis*).**—On my first night on the island I found a small brown kiwi in grass about 15 yards from the back door of the house. On the same night, many kiwis were spotted by torchlight in the orchard, the bull paddock and other grassy areas on the flat. It was a great experience to have kiwis wandering around my tent, sometimes bumping into the sides, sometimes even coming right inside. A noticeable feature was that the feathers were harsh to the touch and were easily shedded. On one or two occasions brown kiwis were found in logs in the forested areas. In general, I found kiwis present from the grass homestead flats through manuka forest into parts of the transition forest in the southern sector of the island. Other traces, in the way of feathers, beak marks in soil, etc., were commonly met with. A large grey-coloured kiwi, found under a log in the transition forest up Te Waikohare Stream, appeared to be either a large spotted kiwi (*Apteryx haastii*) or a most abnormally built and coloured North Island kiwi.

**Little Blue Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*).**—Not many were seen or heard, except at sea, although there was evidence of numerous nests all round the southern part of the island. A penguin found in a burrow in a gully above the Shag Cliffs had two eggs (16/11/49), while others in East Paddock Gully also had eggs (30/11/49). One family was being noisily raised under the tool shed beside the house, and on 23/11/49, a juvenile still in the downy stage was dead beside the shed. Both young and adult penguins could be heard in the evenings making their way up Te Waikohare Stream from the sea. When we were out at sea, fishing at night, penguins could be heard calling loudly and were often seen. They were seen several times on the crossings to and from the island and seemed common in and around Leigh Cove.

**Diving Petrel (*Pelecanoides urinatrix*).**—Frequently visible at sea in the cross-waters off Te Titoki Point. On one occasion (8/12/49) when a moderate gale was in progress, large numbers of petrels were seen disporting themselves among the turbulent waters off the Point. Diving petrels and storm petrels were also numerous on the crossing back to Leigh.

**White-faced Storm Petrel (*Pelagodroma marina*).**—A particularly large group was seen off the entrance to Leigh Cove, 10/12/49.

**Flesh-footed Shearwater (*Puffinus carneipes*).**—A few seen from the boat on the crossings, in the ratio of about one of these birds to 8/10 fluttering shearwaters.

**Fluttering Shearwater (*P. gavia*).**—These birds were numerous at sea on the trip to Little Barrier, especially working over kahawai shoals. On the return trip several hundreds were seen over shoals off Leigh Cove.

**Grey-faced Petrel (*Pterodroma macroptera*).**—None seen.

**Black Petrel (*P. parkinsoni*).**—One bird was seen at sea during the trip from Leigh. A corpse, found on the Summit Track, had the following measurements: Bill 4.5, tarsus 5, body excl tail 34, span total 63. Four corpses were seen on the Thumb Track on one occasion.

**Cook's Petrel (*P. cookii*).**—These petrels were commonly seen at sea off the south-west sector of the island and seemed plentiful within a radius of a few miles of the island during crossings, as well as being conspicuous at sea at night. The birds were heard to come in from the sea each evening shortly after dusk, on an average any time between 7.45 p.m. and 8.15 p.m., depending on weather conditions. The most characteristic call was the usual, 'ti-ti-ti' or 'whi-kek-kek' sound; owl-like 'wheet' sounds and a cat-like 'purr-rrr' were also noted. On stormy or misty nights it must be very difficult for the birds to locate their burrows but it seems that some sort of 'avian radar' must enable them to land with reasonable safety and find their burrows. It appears that many birds strike trees on landing, and when in a dazed or unconscious state, fall easy prey to prowling cats. Many of the dead birds found on the island, I think, were killed finally by cats, after receiving some such previous injury. A count of dead Cook's petrels on the Summit Track (18/11/49) showed 14 fresh corpses (1 with remains of egg), and 13 fairly old corpses. A count on the Thumb Track on the same day showed about 17 (1 with egg). There were also 18 ancient corpses of some unidentified petrel on the Summit Track. A Cook's petrel was found alive at about 1500ft. on the Summit Track, suffering from fatal injuries on the lower part of the back due to a cat's attack. Petrels (presumably *P. cookii*) were heard in deep burrows in a bank just east of the Summit of Little Barrier (Hauturu, 2378ft.). On another occasion (3/12/49) about eight freshly-killed petrels (incl. 1 with egg) were found on the Summit Track. A live bird, found on this track at the same time, had a broken wing and appeared to have struck against some obstacle when landing the previous night. Eight petrels were found dead on the Thumb Track (7/12/49). On one rainy night with very low-lying cloud, the petrels came in very low, starting about 8 p.m. It seemed that all those normally coming in from the eastern side of the island joined those on the west side and the throng of innumerable noisy petrels flying in seemingly only a few feet above my head was an impressive experience.

**Pied Shag (*Phalacrocorax varius*).**—The colony in the pohutukawa trees on the cliffs on the south-west coast I estimated to contain between 35 and 45 nests. Several gaps in the cliff-line showed where trees had fallen out comparatively recently. Many large trees with a number of nests are now very close to the breaking cliff line and in danger of falling in the near future. There are very few pohutukawas of any size behind those on the cliff line and it seems that before very long the whole colony will migrate and re-establish itself elsewhere. At the time of my visit (from mid-November to mid-December) there were all stages of development visible from young fledglings able to fly but still being fed by parent birds, to various nestling stages and eggs. These fledged young were seen to fly down to the sea to feed and return home only to await the return of a parent bird and stimulate the regurgitation of food by running their beaks up and down the parent bird's throat until a food bolus appeared. The only calls I heard were variations of a gull-like harsh 'kaa' theme, uttered only at long intervals and it seemed mainly when a landing bird approached a sitting bird for any reason.

**Gannet (*Morus serrator*).**—Gannets were always seen at sea off some part of the island coastline. A favourite area for diving was between Te Titoki Point and Crayfish Rock along the West Landing. On the crossing to the island, 50-60 were seen fishing not far from the boat. In Leigh Cove, another good area for these birds, two gannets were diving within a few feet of the boat; one of these could be clearly seen in its progress under water extended in its streamline diving position. When it broke surface it was carrying a fish 4 to 5 inches long in its beak. It then tossed the fish in the air, caught it and swallowed it head first.

**Harrier (*Circus approximans*).**—A harrier was seen frequently especially from the Flat, probably the only one in this area at the time.

**Brown Quail (*Synoicus ypsilophorus*).**—I heard typical quail calls on many occasions from various parts of the Flat, especially from patches of sedge where I flushed a pair twice. The population must be quite small, possibly only a very few pairs.

**Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*).**—These terns were seen singly on the south-west coast of the island on a few occasions. (Miss B. E. Brown fide). I saw four fishing in Leigh Cove on the return trip.

**White-fronted Tern (*Sterna striata*).**—A number seen in the vicinity of Leigh and some were always fishing off the south-west coast of Little Barrier although I never saw more than eight in a group.

**Black-backed Gull (*Larus dominicanus*).**—During the whole of my visit I saw only two gulls on the island. Deserted nests at the Pinnacles show that this species is or was breeding.

**Red-billed Gull (*L. novaehollandiae*).**—Scarce on the coasts of the island although it was more numerous at sea off the island. The largest number I saw at one time on the coast-line was four, while on one occasion at sea I counted 48 working over a fish shoal. These gulls were far more numerous in the vicinity of Leigh Cove.

**Pigeon (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*).**—Pigeons were frequently seen in kanuka trees on all parts of the Flat and often were seen feeding in the grass paddocks and lawn in front of the house.

**Brown Kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*).**—Kakas were seen a number of times in all parts of the island in the south-west sector. The largest flock I saw together consisted of 12 birds which flew from Te Waikohare Stream over the house to roost in the pohutukawa trees on Te Titoki Point. An abnormally coloured kaka was seen up the Waipawa Stream. This bird was particularly red on the underparts. A large flock of kakas was seen in a large pohutukawa up the Tirikakawa Stream—several varieties of the usual harsh screech were heard and also the bell-like “clong” uttered when annoyed or angry.

**Red-fronted Parakeet (*Cyanoramphus novaeseelandiae*).**—Commonly seen in all parts of the island visited. Several groups of three or four were seen feeding in cocksfoot in the paddocks round the house. A single parakeet was noted cleaning out a hole, three feet above ground, in a kanuka tree in the East Paddock.

**Yellow-fronted Parakeet (*C. auriceps*).**—I saw a definite yellow-fronted parakeet in the paddocks near the South-West Landing on 15/11/49.

**Shining Cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*).**—Heard in every part of the island that I visited. Many frequented the macrocarpa trees near the cowshed.

**Long-tailed Cuckoo (*Eudynamis taitensis*).**—Calls were always to be heard on the Flat in the early morning and frequently along the various tracks on the island. A few birds were seen high up in kauri trees but not often. These seemed only to be very few cuckoos calling in the gullies but they were heard much more frequently on the various ridges leading to the highest parts of the island.

**Morepork (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*).**—Moreporks were heard from the Flat nearly every evening and were sometimes seen in the various gullies in the south-west part of the island. A pair in East Paddock Gully had a nest in a puriri tree. Two other nests were found in this gully; one had three eggs and the other contained young. In Te Waikohare, I saw a morepork being mobbed by four whiteheads. East Paddock Gully seems to be favourite morepork territory (v. Sibson, N.Z.B.N., Vol. 3, No. 6, p. 153).

**Kingfisher (*Halycon sanctus*).**—A few were always to be seen along the shores of the south-west part of the island. Several times in the transition forest and coastal forest, kingfishers were heard. The old nest recorded by Sibson (op. cit.) was being cleaned out for this season. I

saw one nest about 2½ feet above ground in a bank near the Boatshed on the shore. It had faecal pellets, mainly crustacean remains, scattered about below the entrance and contained at least two eggs.

**Rifleman (*Acanthisitta chloris*)**.—Several were seen up Te Waikohare and calls were heard in Waipawa and Tirikakawa. Four birds were seen up the Thumb Track. A nest was located in the limb of an old puriri tree in Te Waikohare, about 30 feet above sloping ground. The nest in this limb had two openings and the parent birds seemed to enter or leave either hole at random. The cavity in the limb must have been quite large since it could accommodate the two parents birds as well as the young. The parents frequently visited the nest, carrying small grubs, flies and small spiders and opiliones, etc. Over one half-hour period, the parents made a trip every three minutes, while in another half-hour period, a few days later, 21 visits were seen.

**Grey Warbler (*Pseudogerygone igata*)**.—A few were noted among the manuka slopes above the east paddocks. Up Te Waikohare, I saw grey warblers nearly every day but never more than two at the one time.

**Pied Tit (*Petroica macrocephala toitoi*)**.—I found the tit, like the warbler, not common. In the whole of my visit, although I heard several up the Thumb Track, etc., I saw only six birds; one male up Te Waikohare Stream and four males and one female on the Shag Track.

**North Island Robin (*Miro australis*)**.—Robins were seen frequently up Te Waikohare, especially in the higher parts, and I saw a single bird up Waipawa. Mrs. Parkin found a nest in the fork of a manuka tree, 2ft. 3in. above ground, on the right-hand branch of Te Waikohare Stream. The nest contained three feathered young (2/12/49) but on 8/12/49 Mrs. Parkin and I found the nest to have only two young. There was no sign of damage to the nest or of the remaining young.

**Pied Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*)**.—Fantails seemed quite abundant in all parts of the island that I visited, especially in the manuka slopes and transition forest of gullies such as Waipawa, Te Waikohare or Tirikakawa. Birds, usually in pairs, were frequently met with on the Thumb and Summit tracks. I saw a bird sitting in a nest in a manuka thicket above the east paddocks (30/11/49).

**Whitehead (*Mohoua ochrocephala albicilla*)**.—These birds seemed to be everywhere in the bush on the island. A nest with one fresh egg, was found in kanuka in the East Paddock (16/11/49).

**Tui (*Prothemadera novaeseelandia*)**.—Tuis were everywhere abundant in the forested areas and were especially noticeable on Te Titoki Point, flying from one stand of pohutukawas to another. Mrs. Parkin (who has the most wonderful intuition for finding nests that I have ever seen) found a nest high up a kanuka tree near the Thumb Track. It contained three young. During my visit we found two young tuis (c. 10 days old) which had fallen out of a high nest in the garden. It was found impossible to replace them in the nest so Mrs. Parkin reared them by feeding them at night with oatmeal (which she first had to thoroughly chew; a grim labour of love!) and during the day time, placing them in an old cage to be fed by the parent tui. This co-operative motherhood carried on for several days until the young were able to fly away with the parent birds.

**Bellbird (*Anthornis melanura*)**.—Bellbirds were not very common but, nevertheless, appeared generally distributed. A nest in a grape vine beside the house, which Mrs. Parkin has kept under observation for three seasons, had three young which were later killed by a rat. The parent birds built another nest under a creeper growing against one of the sheds.

**Stitch Bird (*Notiomystis cincta*)**.—This bird is one of the magnets drawing ornithologists to Little Barrier. There seems to be a travelling population of these birds from one part of the island to another as their food becomes available. I had a very pleasing run of luck in observing

the stitch bird at close quarters. The first bird I saw (19/11/49) was a male, clearly seen from a distance of a few feet, about 10 yards up Te Waikohare from Mr. Parkin's fowl yard. Later, I saw a female a few dozen yards further up the stream. Still higher up, I saw another pair which seemed to be making a round of their territory, passing me regularly every 9 or 10 minutes. Two distinct calls were heard—the usual "tzit-tzit," and also a bell-like whistle, like a cross between the note of a tui and that of a whitehead. After this I saw and/or heard stitch birds each time I went into Te Waikohare. Sometimes I would see a pair or at other times only a single bird fly past me. I never saw more than two pairs together. On 26/11/49, at 6.0 a.m. a male was heard calling very close to the house. There follows a resume of the more important observations that I noted: Two pairs, left branch of Te Waikohare and 1 pair right branch, 20/11/49; 1 pair, lower Te Waikohare, male seen 10 feet away, also an odd female seen nearby, 20/11/49; two pairs, Te Waikohare, 21/11/49; one pair, Te Waikohare, 27/11/49; female, Te Waikohare, 28/11/49; one pair, Waipawa, 2/12/49; female, Summit Track, 3/12/49; male seen 6 to 8 feet away, Thumb Track, 7/12/49; three males, Tirikakawa, 8/12/49. Stitch birds seemed to be cleaning out the nest noted by M. C. Hanna and B. D. Heather (4/1/48) in a large pohutukawa, a chain off the Thumb Track. Miss Brown and I noted another stitch bird call, new to us, in Tirikakawa Stream. As one of us expressed it, it was like a "kingfisher's note sawn in half."

**Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*).**—I saw two birds near the house and heard another singing in a manuka at the entrance of Waipawa.

**Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*).**—Five seen in the Bull Paddock but I think they were to be found in more abundance elsewhere.

**Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*).**—A pair seen near the South-west Landing, behaving as if nesting (22/11/49). One was seen at the entrance to Waipawa.

**Song Thrush (*Turdus ericetorum*).**—Breeding.

**Blackbird (*T. merula*).**—Four nests were found—two with eggs in the orchard, one with three young in pohutukawa in Te Waikohare Stream; one with two young, Thumb Track.

**Hedge Sparrow (*Prunella modularis*).**—Mrs. Parkin found two nests during my visit.

**Lark (*Alauda arvensis*).**—A group of five seen in the paddocks near the South-West Landing.

**Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*).**—A flock of c. 20 was seen flying out to sea from Waipawa mouth. Another group of eight was seen close to the house.

**White-backed Magpie (*Gymnorhina hypoleuca*).**—A pair of magpies frequented the Flat during my visit. According to Mr. Parkin, they appeared on 1/9/49.

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**BIRD OBSERVATIONS IN TARARUAS.**—In February, 1950, on a solo tramp in the Tararuas, I was on a cleared ridge (about 2000ft. to 2500ft.) when a harrier flew from below just in front of me and little higher than my head. It was immediately followed by a bush hawk which "zoomed" and then dived straight at the harrier. The latter turned over and struck with its right leg, making a loud hissing noise. The bush hawk evaded and made a swift climbing turn (an Immelman) and dived again. The harrier repeated and then flew rapidly into the bush below. The bush hawk flew to the top of a tall dead tree and let out a triumphant shriek. At night, between 10 o'clock and midnight, I was sitting on a tall stump in a clearing a little away from the hut in the moonlight. I was surprised at the number of small flights of birds that passed over in no particular direction, but from and to all points of the compass and flying fairly high. I had no conception what they were. I had come out partly to see if I could spot a bird I had heard



screech several times. Five different moreporks had been calling; one had been in the tree outside the hut door, but the other call was a high pitched long screech. I had subconsciously registered it as what we termed at Home a screech owl and went out to see if I could spot it. I had located the call as coming from a tall more or less dead tree at the south end of the clearing, and had been on my stump perhaps half an hour when an owl flew out from that direction and circled round me twice, then flew back into the shadow of the tree and screeched two or three times. I was unable in the moonlight to distinguish any colouring—it looked either deep black when between me and the moon or silvery grey when circling the other side, but it struck me as being about half as big again as a morepork, two of which had previously silently flitted by. I took it for granted to be the screech owl of England both from size and voice—but I can find no record of this owl in "Oliver." I heard the bird (without question an owl of some species, as I know from its perfectly noiseless flight and the general shape and the formation of the wing, as it circled me twice within a few yards), several times through the night (owing to a grey 'possum which would share the hut with me I had very little sleep). Later on it was hunting in the valley below but the shrill screech could easily be heard at intervals.—A. A. Savell, Levin. [It is possible that this bird was an Australian barn owl (*Tyto alba*). One was obtained in Westland in 1947.—Ed.]

WESTPORT BIRD NOTES (period March, 1949, to June, 1950).—There is a great variety and abundance of bird life in this district. Unfortunately the average resident has little appreciation and respect for it. Except for small clumps of bush along the streams and rivers and in swampy areas the countryside is mostly cleared. However, there remains much bush on the surrounding hills and in the Buller Gorge five to six miles away. Approximate distances shown are from the Post Office in the centre of the town. Black Shag: Often seen in Buller River and near mouth of Orowaiti River; 1½m. White Heron: An annual visitor. Seen May, 1949, near bridge over Orowaiti River; 1m. Subsequently reported from Ngakawau. Again seen near bridge on 17/6/50. White-faced Heron: Several pairs are usually to be seen on the banks of the Buller and Orowaiti rivers; 4/12/49, one seen at Tauranga Bay, 8m; 17/6/50, three at Orowaiti River. Black Swan: 1949, one at Orowaiti R. Bittern: 17/6/50, two seen in small swampy area about half-mile from P.O. Reported to be not uncommon. Harrier: Not uncommon; 21/6/50, 1 seen flying high over centre of town. Pukeko: Not common. One alighted on tree at McKennas Creek, 2m.; small number at Fairdown, 5m.; 1 on Nine-Mile Road, 3m. Pied Oystercatcher: May, 1949, often up to six to be seen at teatime near mouth of Orowaiti R.; 2m. Black Oystercatcher: 1949, one or two occasionally near mouth of Orowaiti R.; 1½m. Banded Dotterel: 2/1/50, one at Carters Beach, 3m. Red-billed Gull: 1950, numbers seen in ground of Westport South School. Wood Pigeon: 27/8/49 and 23/10/49, one at McKennas Creek, 2m.; 5/11/49, one at Giles Creek, 3m. Not common around Westport. Morepork: 13/6/50, young morepork caught; later released. Moreporks are heard from time to time about the town. Kingfisher: Very common and always to be seen near bridge over Orowaiti R., 1m. 18/6/50, counted 17 on wire between two telegraph poles near Orowaiti Bridge. Pipit: Very common on outskirts of town and in surrounding countryside. Fern Bird: 1/7/50, two on Caroline Terrace, 5m. This is pakihi land, wet and covered with stunted manuka, rushes, etc., a most bleak-looking area and entirely unsuited for cultivation. Grey Warbler: Fairly common; often seen or heard. Yellow-breasted Tit: 4/6/49, one at Reservoir, 3m.; 17/7/49, one at McKennas Creek; 28/8/49, several near Seddonville, 25m.; 5/11/49, one at Giles Creek; 22/12/49, one at Buller R.; 1/7/50, three at Omanu Creek, 6m. Robin: 7/3/50, two at Ohikanui R., 10m.; quite tame; frequently reported from this area. Fantail (Pied): Very common and always to be seen about town and outskirts. Black form also fairly common. Tui: August, 1949, very common at McKennas Creek when

kowhai in full bloom; occasionally seen and heard other times of year; 16/1/50, only one heard at McKennas Creek, 2m. Bellbird: Common in surrounding districts. Greenfinch: 17/7/49, several at McKennas Creek; 21/6/50, 1, and 25/6/50, several seen in town, also at Coal Creek, 5m. Chaffinch: Common. Goldfinch: 15/7/49, common near Orowaiti R.; 5/6/50, one in Buller Gorge. Yellowhammer: 15/7/49, fairly common near Orowaiti R. Song Thrush and Blackbird: Fairly common. Hedge Sparrow: Occasionally seen about the house. Skylark: 15/7/49, heard singing at Orowaiti R., where frequently to be seen and heard. Starling: Common at Orowaiti River; May, 1949, many large flocks seen coming upstream each evening before dusk. Amongst others the following birds have also been reported: Weka, blue duck, grey duck, rifleman, kaka, and possibly kiwi, also red-fronted parakeet. These have yet to be confirmed at first hand.—V. M. Readman, Westport.

WOOD PIGEONS EATING SHOOTS AND LEAVES.—At Te Araroa I was in the garden, about December 23, 1949, when a wood pigeon fluttered across and settled on the top of a slender Lawsoniana. In a few seconds it was joined by another, then another until there were five. They picked the little green shoots for a while, then one by one they came to an apple tree not more than six yards from where I sat on the grass. They made a real meal of apple leaves and didn't seem to bother about me at all, though they must have seen me. Their close proximity gave me an excellent opportunity of seeing their beautiful plumage. On another evening they came back and all five sat on the Lawsoniana bending down its slender top and swaying up and down, picking at the shoots.—M. M. Taylor, Gisborne.

IRRUPTION OF BLACK SWANS.—For the last two weeks (first two weeks in June) hundreds of black swans have frequented the Manukau Harbour, near the mouth of the Big Muddy Creek. The first day I saw six, second day 38, the third day 536 and since then the numbers have increased so much I find it impossible to count them through the telescope. During the years I have lived here I have never seen swans in this locality before.—Mrs. J. Howes, Laingholm, via New Lynn.

## CORRESPONDENCE.

### SHINING CUCKOO.

(To the Editor.)

Sir,—It was not my intention to reply to J. S. Watson and P. C. Bull's summing up of my observations (*Forest and Bird*, 55, 5, 1940) in your issue of April, 1950, but so many friends have written to me suggesting a reply I do so to please them.

From 1909 to 1924 my life was spent breaking in a block of native bush about 16 miles back from Opotiki, Bay of Plenty. Access to my section was by bridle track, six miles of which was through virgin bush, another two miles through newly felled and grassed bush land, with odd pieces of native bush, ideal breeding places for many birds, including the grey warbler and the shining cuckoo. My children and I knew our native birds intimately, including the blue wattled crow (and knew where to find its habitat) as well as seeing flocks of kakas and many a kaka's nest while I was felling bush, not to mention kererus, tuis and bellbirds in abundance. I had a piece of native bush reserved within fifty yards of my homestead with native trees and exotic hedges, together with one hundred fruit trees between this and my house, the whole making a splendid field for observation.

All those years I kept a yearly record of when the first shining cuckoo was seen (not heard)—the usual date was September (often heard earlier), occasionally early October, sufficient time for the cuckoo to lay her eggs and for the young to be hatched by late November. My wife and family all learned to recognise our native birds—the children used the term "pip pip" for the shining cuckoo, which, together with the long-tailed cuckoo, was a regular visitor. On at least one occasion a

shining cuckoo remained the whole winter in the bush reserve on my section. We all knew the screech of the grey warbler and what it meant—that a cuckoo was molesting it.

Not only did I find the eggs of shining cuckoos in the grey warblers' and fantails' nests, but my elder son did the same. Where there were many leaves below we frequently found a complete and unbroken egg of the grey warbler below a grey warbler's nest, showing that the shining cuckoo does not always destroy or eat the egg of the host, nor does it always tip all the grey warbler's eggs out of the nest. From the verandah of the house we have watched a grey warbler feeding a young cuckoo. My younger son's birthday is in November, and for years it was his birthday wish that I show him the egg or the young of a shining cuckoo in a grey warbler's nest, or in that of other birds.

Many times my three children and I would patiently watch a shining cuckoo perched above a grey warbler's nest, but though we waited long we did not witness the actual placing of the egg within the nest, though the cuckoo egg would be there next morning.

Just what the mention of Dr. Falla's information about the time when young cuckoos appear in Wellington has to do with my observations in the Bay of Plenty, I cannot imagine.

The colour, the size and the notes of young cuckoos are enough to distinguish the young from adults, surely—at least to one who had closely observed these birds, their eggs and their young over fifteen years alone.—I am, etc., DAVID H. GRAHAM, 28 White's Line East, Lower Hutt. August 14, 1950.

## REVIEWS.

**Some South-Pacific Sea-bird Logs, by C. A. Fleming. (Based on observations by R. A. Falla, C. A. Fleming and R. B. Sibson). Emu, Vol. 49, 1950, pp. 169-188, eight figures.**

Written with the chief object of recording northward limits of southern sea-birds, this informative paper will be welcomed by ornithologists who may be making ocean voyages, especially as reprints are available, as long as the supply lasts, to intending travellers. Useful aids to identification are given, notably in the diagrammatic sketches of some of the species encountered. After introductory matter, logs are included of five voyages on which the paper is based, and then follow a summary of the distribution limits of selected species and a discussion.—R.H.D.S.

**The Opening of Milk Bottles by Birds.—James Fisher and R. A. Hinde, British Birds, XLII, pp. 347-357. (A publication of the British Trust for Ornithology.)**

This paper records the result of an investigation in which 126 members of the Trust and many of the public took part, through the medium of a questionnaire, and is an admirable example of this method of inquiry. The habit of prising open the waxboard tops of milk bottles and drinking the milk was first observed near Southampton in 1921, and since then it has become widespread in England and some parts of Wales, Scotland and Ireland. A series of maps shows at a glance the spread of the habit, which seems to have arisen spontaneously in many areas, and which is then copied by other birds in the district. It may not develop in a district until several years after the introduction of bottled milk, and it is unknown in Holland, where metal foil stoppers are widely used: these, however, are also opened in England. It seems possible that birds learn of the association of food and bottles through leaky tops, but L.S.V.V. in "The Ibis" (Vol. 92, 2) suggests that the habit may have originated through birds pecking at the waxed covers for their fatty content. The habit has been observed mainly in blue and great tits, but it may become of particular interest in this country as it has also been recorded in small numbers in the house sparrow, blackbird, starling, robin (*Erithacus melophilus*), chaffinch, song thrush and hedge sparrow, all of which, with the exception of the robin, are found in New Zealand.—J.M.C.

FRIGATE BIRD AT TAURANGA.—I have received an interesting report from Mr. A. H. Watson, Mt. Maunganui, of the occurrence of a female greater frigate bird. I showed the description and a sketch to Mr. E. G. Turbott and he agreed with the identification. Mr. Watson wrote: "I am enclosing a drawing I have made of a bird that was circling high over the Tauranga Harbour this afternoon (20/5/50). Judging from the height of the Mount, it must have been flying at between 700 and 800 feet. It would be, I think, as big or slightly bigger than a gannet; it had black wings and tail which was much forked. It had lost a feather on one side, also had a break in one wing, a white chin and breast and the bill was long and looked pointed but couldn't be sure at the height it was flying, nor could I be sure of the colour, but it looked reddish. No sign of its legs. The wings gave an occasional slight movement, but it was mostly a glide. The bird disappeared seaward to the north."—J. Davenport, Auckland.

FRIGATE BIRD AT WHANGAREI.—The occurrence of a frigate bird, probably a female greater frigate bird, at Whangarei, is reported by Mr. D. Purser, who, writing on June 29th, 1950, states:—"Yesterday I had a friend ring me to say that he had watched a frigate bird for some considerable time during the morning near Limestone Island, which is off Onerahi, in the Whangarei Harbour. He saw it dive on a Caspian tern which had caught a fish. The tern dropped its bundle very smartly and the frigate bird swooped down and got the fish. My informant, Mr. Jack Fisher, had spent much time in the Cook Islands group and had seen these birds by the hundred and had eaten them. He was able to give a good description of the specimen, which was black on top with a white throat and chest. It had the usual long bill with a pronounced hook and sharply swept-back wings, with a forked tail. It was in good condition and was very active when the terns were feeding. It is possible that it got blown south with a cyclonic storm which came down the Tasman two or three days before the bird was seen here."—Communicated by Mr. E. G. Turbott, Auckland.

## SCIENTIFIC NAMES.

The scientific names of birds mentioned in this issue, where not given in the text, are:—

Bellbird ( <i>Anthornis melanura</i> ).	Kiwi ( <i>Apteryx</i> sp.).
Bittern ( <i>Botaurus poiciloptilus</i> ).	Knot ( <i>Calidris canutus</i> ).
Blackbird ( <i>Turdus merula</i> ).	Morepork ( <i>Ninox novaeseelandiae</i> ).
Chaffinch ( <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> ).	Oyster-catcher ( <i>Haematopus</i> sp.).
Crow, Blue-wattled ( <i>Callaeas wilsoni</i> )	Parakeet, Red-fronted ( <i>Cyanoramphus</i>
Cuckoo, Shining ( <i>Chalcites lucidus</i> )	<i>novaeseelandiae</i> ).
Dotterel, Banded ( <i>Charadrius bicinctus</i> )	Pigeon (Native or Wood) ( <i>Hemiphaga</i>
N.Z. ( <i>Pluviorhynchus obscurus</i> )	<i>novaeseelandiae</i> ).
Duck, Blue ( <i>Hymenolaimus malacorhynchus</i> ).	Pipit ( <i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i> ).
" Grey ( <i>Anas poicilorhyncha</i> )	Pukeko ( <i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i> ).
Fantail ( <i>Rhipidura fuliginosa</i> )	Rifleman ( <i>Acanthisitta chloris</i> ).
Fern-bird ( <i>Bowdleria punctata</i> )	Robin ( <i>Miro australis</i> ).
Frigate Bird, Greater ( <i>Fregata minor</i> )	Shag, Black ( <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> ).
Gannet ( <i>Morus serrator</i> )	" Pied ( <i>Phalacrocorax varius</i> )
Godwit ( <i>Limosa lapponica</i> )	Shearwater, Buller's ( <i>Puffinus bulleri</i> )
Goldfinch ( <i>Carduelis carduelis</i> )	" Fluttering ( <i>Puffinus gavia</i> ).
Greenfinch ( <i>Chloris chloris</i> )	Skylark ( <i>Alauda arvensis</i> )
Gull, Black-backed ( <i>Larus dominicanus</i> )	Sparrow, House ( <i>Passer domesticus</i> ).
" Red-billed ( <i>L. hollandiae</i> ).	Starling ( <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> )
Harrier ( <i>Circus approximans</i> )	Stilt ( <i>Himantopus himantopus</i> ).
Hawk, Bush ( <i>Falco novaeseelandiae</i> )	Swan, Black ( <i>Cygnus atratus</i> ).
Hedge Sparrow ( <i>Prunella modularis</i> )	Thrush, Song ( <i>Turdus ericetorum</i> ).
Heron, White ( <i>Casmerodius albus</i> ).	Tit, Yellow-breasted ( <i>Petroica macro-</i>
" white-faced ( <i>Notophoxz novaehol-</i>	<i>cephala</i> ).
<i>landiae</i> .	Tui ( <i>Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae</i> ).
Kaka ( <i>Nestor meridionalis</i> ).	Warbler, Grey ( <i>Pseudogerygone igata</i> ).
Kingfisher ( <i>Halcyon sanctus</i> ).	Weka, S.I. ( <i>Gallirallus australis</i> ).
	Yellowhammer ( <i>Emberiza citrinella</i> ).

FILM EVENING AND ADDRESS IN MASTERTON.—About 75 people, including members of the Ornithological Society, were present at a film evening and address arranged by Masterton members of the society on August 12. The speaker was Dr. R. A. Falla, Director of the Dominion Museum, and the films shown included those of the notornis and Takahe Valley, and the white heron colony in Westland.

DONATIONS ACKNOWLEDGED.—Donations received since June 30, 1949, are acknowledged with thanks as follow:—Up to March 31, 1950: Anon, 6d; Dr. C. C. Anderson, 11/9; T. E. C. Bridge, 5/-; Miss N. P. Finlayson, 10/-; A. A. Kirk, 10/-; Mrs. R. F. Lenz, £1; D. G. Macmillan, 10/-; T. C. O'Callaghan, 2/6; Bernard Sladden, £1; G. H. Young, 4/6; total, £4/14/3. In the current financial year up to August 31, 1950: Anon, 2/7; G. G. Austin, 10/-; A. A. Boulton, 5/-; W. K. Coad, 2/6; W. F. I. Hunt, 10/-; Miss B. McDougall, 10/-; N. Scrymgeour, 5/-; A. H. Watson, 5/-; D. G. Williams, 2/6; total, £2/12/7. For Illustrations Fund: Anon, 14/6; C. A. Fleming, £2; total, £2/14/6.

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- |  |  |
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