

SHORT NOTES ON SOME NEW ZEALAND BIRDS.

BY H. G. DEIGNAN.

DURING the first fortnight of June, 1932, I enjoyed the interesting experience of visiting the North Island of New Zealand, paying especial attention to the bird-life of the country. To one who has just come from the forests and plains of Australia with their abundance of birds, it is something of a shock to see the denuded and over-grazed hills of the North Island, and to walk through large areas of the "native bush" without hearing or seeing a native bird. It is an unpleasant surprise to find the native forests vanishing before the onslaughts of the axe and of introduced herbivores and with the forests the birds whose survival hangs on their continued presence, to be replaced with government-planted stands of eucalypts and boreal conifers, inhabited by Chaffinches and Song-Thrushes!

New Zealand, as is well known, is the Paradise of Acclimatization Societies, whose activities suffer no restraint by the Dominion Government, and scarcely a year passes without some new importation to harry further the native biota; this year it is the Chukar and the Nightingale. It is unhappily true that in all countries the view is held that the natural life of a land is the possession of its people, to be protected or destroyed at will. It might more justly be considered, ignoring the right to life of the creatures themselves, that the flora and fauna of any part of the world belong to mankind as a whole and are merely held as a trust by the inhabitants of the particular region.

Of late years certain places have been set aside by the Dominion Government as wild-life sanctuaries. Owing to the prevalence of introduced predatory mammals such as weasels and stoats, to say nothing of feral dogs and cats, such refuges, to be successful, must be on islands off the coast. This means that in many cases birds which need protection must be introduced to the sanctuaries from the mainland. A particularly bad mistake was made in establishing the Weka on Kapiti, when a male of *Gallirallus greyi* and a female of *Gallirallus australis* were released together!

Through the courtesy of the Honorable the Minister for Indus-

tries and Commerce I obtained a permit to visit the sanctuary of Little Barrier Island, where native birds of many species are still numerous, but owing to a protracted northerly gale which precluded any possibility of landing on the island, I was unable to avail myself of this privilege in the time at my disposal.

It must be remembered that at no time had New Zealand a large representation of land-birds, and that, due to the inclemency of the winter weather, I did not visit the wilder South Island, where more birds might have been seen. However, I travelled over a great portion of North Island, and, wherever possible, went out of my way to places where native birds were said to occur. It will be noted that in almost every case where I found a species numerous, it was either a marine form or a bird which is common or abundant in Australia or elsewhere, and hence possessed of no especial interest as a New Zealand bird.

It may be well to give a brief account of the localities mentioned in the following notes, for the benefit of those unacquainted with New Zealand geography. Wellington, as is well known, lies on the cliff-bound shore of Cook Strait. The city is confined between the harbor and a range of steep grass-covered hills. No native land-birds were seen, though European forms were numerous, and certain water-fowl were common in the harbor.

Auckland, some three hundred miles north of Wellington, is placed on the narrow isthmus between Hauraki Gulf and Manokau Bay. The vast mudflats of Manokau were, according to Buller, the winter home of large numbers of Wry-billed Plover and other interesting waders, and probably, even to-day, support many migratory shore-birds during the northern winter. I found only three species, one of them represented by a solitary example. Three or four native birds can be seen on the Auckland Domain, a large park surrounding the new War Memorial Museum of natural history. This elegant building placed on a hilltop is the first and last sight of New Zealand to those entering or leaving Auckland by sea.

Titirangi, in the Waitakeri Hills, is a large tract of almost virgin forest belonging to the people of Auckland, and about twenty miles distant by motor-car. The native flora and fauna are here protected by law, but the Kiwi, though formerly common, has not

been reported for years, and, excepting a few Pigeons and rather a lot of Tuis, no unusual birds were seen.

Leigh is a hamlet on the east coast some fifty miles north of Auckland and the place of embarkation for the Little Barrier by the bi-monthly mail-boat. The shore rises in steep, high cliffs from the sea and there are numerous reefs. A few miles above is a long, wide beach of white sand, Pakhare. The inland hills have been long cleared for grazing, but a few tiny patches of bush, completely devoid of bird-life, persist in the hollows and gulleys. Native land-birds were almost absent, and confined to a few common species.

Rotorua, the capital of the thermal districts, is in the north centre of the Island. Probably at no time, in this region of geysers, hot lakes, boiling springs, lava, and other evidences of volcanic activity, were birds numerous, but, thanks to the prohibition of shooting on the Government lands, certain species not seen elsewhere proved to be rather common.

Mamuku is a village about ten miles from Rotorua, surrounded by native bush, and here in small numbers were seen eight species of bush-birds. At no other place did I find so many species. As lumbering is the chief pursuit in the neighborhood, it is probably only a question of time until the birds disappear from here too.

The Tongariro National Park embraces the country about the active volcanoes, Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe, and Tongariro. A fine hotel has been built near timberline by the Dominion Government. Although, at the time of my visit, the country was under snow, certain European birds were common up to the limit of trees, and at least two native species were exceedingly numerous.

1. *Podiceps rufopectus*. NEW ZEALAND GREBE.—Two seen on Lake Rotomahana near Rotorua.

2. *Daption capense*. CAPE PIGEON.—Common in the Tasman Sea and in Cook Strait.

3. *Macronectes giganteus*. GIANT PETREL.—Fairly common in Cook Strait; one followed the ship into Wellington Harbor.

4. *Pachyptila* sp. PRION.—Birds of this genus were abundant in the Tasman Sea.

5. *Diomedea exulans*. WANDERING ALBATROSS.—Very common in the Tasman Sea and Cook Strait; one followed the ship into Wellington Harbor.

6. *Thalassarche melanophrys*. BLACK-BROWED ALBATROSS.—This was the commonest bird seen in New Zealand waters, excepting the Prions.

7. *Phalacrocorax carbo*. COMMON CORMORANT.—This Cormorant is common everywhere, in spite of the price on its head. Owing to its wariness, harmless species are usually shot in its stead by the bounty-hunters.

8. *Phalacrocorax varius*. PIED CORMORANT.—This common Australian bird is equally common on the New Zealand coasts.

9. *Phalacrocorax brevirostris*. WHITE-THROATED CORMORANT.—About a dozen were seen on a small pond in the suburbs of Auckland.

10. *Morris serrator*. AUSTRALIAN GANNET.—Seen daily in small numbers at Leigh.

11. *Casarca variegata*. PARADISE DUCK.—Two pairs of this handsome Sheldrake were seen resting on the shore of Lake Rotomahana near Rotorua. They showed no concern when the launch passed within thirty feet of them.

12. *Anas superciliosa*. GRAY DUCK.—This Duck appeared to be common everywhere. Several wild pairs live with domestic Mallards on a tiny pond in the Auckland Domain.

13. *Spatula rhynchotis*. AUSTRALIAN SHOVELLER.—One female was seen on a small pond near Auckland with Gray Ducks.

14. *Nyroca novae-seelandiae*. NEW ZEALAND SCAUP.—Several hundred Scaups were seen on Lake Rotorua.

15. *Hydroprogne caspia*. CASPIAN TERN.—Common along the coast north of Auckland.

16. *Sterna striata*. WHITE-FRONTED TERN.—Large flocks were seen daily near Leigh, resting on the reefs.

17. *Larus dominicanus*. SOUTHERN BLACK-BACKED GULL.—This fine Gull is abundant along the coast and in the harbors.

18. *Larus novae-hollandiae*. SILVER GULL.—Common on the coast and also inland. Flocks may be seen feeding in fields and on the lawns of city parks.

19. *Charadrius bicinctus*. BANDED DOTREL.—Hundreds of these Plover were found on the great flats of Manokau Bay at low tide.

20. *Limosa lapponica*. BAR-TAILED GODWIT.—One was seen at Manokau Bay.

21. *Himantopus leucocephalus*. WHITE-HEADED STILT.—Stilts occurred in hundreds at Manokau Bay.

22. *Gallirallus greyi*. NORTH ISLAND WEKA.—At Leigh, while investigating hollow logs, on the off-chance of a Kiwi, I drew forth from one the mummified corpse of a Weka, probably the victim of a weasel. A pair was said to occur in a mangrove swamp a few miles from the village, but I saw nothing of them. However, I was so fortunate as to see, while at Leigh, a wild bird, which was in the habit of coming into a dooryard to take food from a man's fingers, in spite of the presence of *nine* cats in the garden. The bird could not be touched and kept a watchful eye on the

felines; it ran back into the bush at the approach of strangers. The people of the house told me that a pair of Blue Penguins bred in the garden under an overturned boat last year.

23. *Porphyrio melanotus*. NEW ZEALAND PURPLE GALLINULE.—This species was numerous at a pond near Auckland.

24. *Demigretta sacra*. REEF HERON.—Birds in the gray phase are common along the coast and one was seen regularly on a buoy in Wellington Harbor.

25. *Botaurus poiciloptilus*. AUSTRALIAN BITTERN.—One was seen from the bus at a marshy place beside the Rotorua-Taupo highway.

26. *Phasianus colchicus* × *P. torquatus*. PHEASANT.—Common about Leigh.

27. *Synoicus australis*. BROWN QUAIL.—Two coveys of this Australian bird were seen near Leigh.

28. *Callipepla californica*. CALIFORNIA VALLEY QUAIL.—Common everywhere where conditions are suitable, often entering gardens.

29. *Hemiphaga novae-seelandiae*. NEW ZEALAND PIGEON.—Only two of these lovely Pigeons were seen at Titirangi, although they were said to be numerous.

30. *Circus approximans*. NEW ZEALAND HARRIER.—It is pleasant to record that, in spite of bounties and constant persecution, this widely distributed species is really common throughout the Island.

31. *Ninox novae-seelandiae*. NEW ZEALAND OWL.—One was seen on a wooded cliff at Leigh, being mobbed by Fantails. Of another, near timberline in the National Park, I was able to secure good photographs.

32. *Halcyon sanctus*. SACRED KINGFISHER.—This species has become commoner with the clearing of the bush. It is frequently seen perched on telegraph poles along country roads.

33. *Acanthisitta chloris*. RIFLEMAN.—Rather common in the Mamuku bush, and the commonest bird in the forest at high elevations in the National Park. In appearance and notes it is reminiscent of the Golden-crowned Kinglet.

34. *Anthus novae-seelandiae*. NEW ZEALAND PIPIT.—The Pipit has benefited by the spread of cultivation and is common on country roads and along the beaches.

35. *Pseudogerygone igata*. GRAY WARBLER.—This bird was common in the Domain at Auckland and was seen at most of the localities visited.

36. *Petroica toitoi*. NORTH ISLAND TIT.—I saw a number of these charming birds at Mamuku along the roadsides and amongst fallen trees where the bush had recently been cleared.

37. *Miro longipes*. NORTH ISLAND ROBIN.—I found one pair of these attractive birds in the dense forest at Mamuku. They stayed close to the ground and were very inconspicuous in the deep shade.

38. *Rhipidura flabellifera*. GRAY FANTAIL FLYCATCHER.—This was the commonest land-bird at all localities visited. They were equally numerous in gardens and forest.

39. **Mohoua albicilla.** WHITEHEAD.—A flock of about thirty was seen at Mamuku near the edge of the forest, later flying in twos and threes across the road into a patch of second-growth.
40. **Zosterops halmaturina.** SILVER-EYE.—The self-introduced Blight-bird is a common dooryard bird throughout the country.
41. **Prothemadera novae-seelandiae.** TUI.—The Tui has benefited by the introduction of eucalypts. It was fairly common at Titirangi and a few were seen at Leigh.
42. **Anthornis melanura.** BELL-BIRD.—Two were seen at the edge of the bush at Mamuku.
43. **Chloris chloris.** GREENFINCH.—Common everywhere.
44. **Fringilla coelebs.** CHAFFINCH.—Very common throughout, even at high elevations and in dense forest.
45. **Acanthis sp.** REDPOLL.—Common about the hot springs at Rotorua.
46. **Carduelis carduelis.** GOLDFINCH.—In large flocks and abundant.
47. **Passer domesticus.** HOUSE WEAVER.—Abundant everywhere.
48. **Emberiza citrinella.** YELLOW-HAMMER.—Very common.
49. **Turdus philomelos.** SONG THRUSH.—Abundant throughout the Island. One flew aboard the ship in the Tasman Sea two hundred miles west of New Zealand.
50. **Turdus merula.** BLACKBIRD.—Abundant.
51. **Prunella modularis.** HEDGE ACCENTOR.—Few were seen, but probably many were overlooked.
52. **Alauda arvensis.** SKY LARK.—Oliver says that "the Skylark is reckoned the most destructive pest after the Sparrow. It is quite a common bird and therefore especially troublesome to farm and garden crops." Unfortunately, many of the country people confuse the Lark with the Ground-Lark (Pipit) and blame the latter for the other's depredations. That the Larks planted in the United States did not survive may be reason for congratulation.
53. **Sturnus vulgaris.** STARLING.—Abundant everywhere.
54. **Gymnorhina hypoleuca.** WHITE-BACKED CROW-SHRIKE.—A small colony of these fine singers inhabited a wooded ravine near Leigh.

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