

A NEW RED-BILLED GULL COLONY.

By J. M. CUNNINGHAM.

A visit was made to the Red-billed Gull (*Larus novae-hollandiae*) colony at Te Awaite, on the East Coast, on the 22nd and 23rd December, 1945, by the writer and R. A. Daniell. It was found that there were two colonies, both on rocky islands a few yards offshore, on an otherwise unbroken coastline. The more southerly is inaccessible except for a few minutes at dead low tide, on the calmest days, and is of considerable size; an estimate of c. 400 birds probably being too low. Nests were seen to be on ledges on the steep slopes, and the gulls appeared to have the place to themselves except for 10 White-fronted Tern (*Sterna striata*) which were resting on rocky outcroppings.

The other colony is much smaller and more accessible, being connected with the mainland at low tide. It is flatter, lower, and has grassy patches together with areas of ice-plant (unidentified), used for nest building. On the evening of the 22nd there was only one chick, still wet, but six more hatched during the following morning, and nine more eggs were then chipping. There were 20 nests containing a single egg or chick; 27 with two, and three with three eggs or chicks. In addition there was a nest containing three eggs, one of which hatched, but some of these may have rolled in from above, as there were five others half in the nest, obviously accidental—A total of 51 nests. There were also 74 incomplete nests, and a certain amount of casual building appeared to be going on, though there were not sufficient birds present to account for more than a dozen empty nests. Either these birds were away feeding, or the nests were never intended for use, a point which requires investigation.

One or two notes seem worth recording. One bird walked to a nest containing an egg which it deliberately, though clumsily, prodded with the tip of its bill, obviously trying to pierce it. This failed, however, and the bird then toyed with the nesting material, eventually walking away. It was noticed that when a bird, not sitting on a nest, began to play with nesting material, others, similarly unoccupied, followed suit, and on these occasions sitting birds protested vigorously on their approach, evidently anticipating robbery with violence. When these unoccupied birds were not playing with material, they were allowed to wander unmolested amongst sitting birds. A chick, under 24 hours old, was seen to be fed on about three teaspoonsful of a dark, slimy, greenish food. The chick gulped it down readily while it was issuing from the parent's bill, but made no attempt to pick it up from the edge of the nest. The surplus was eaten by the parent. Birds were seen to change places on the nest.

Several burrows were found, containing one or two dead gulls, which had been eaten on the back of the neck, and an egg was found in one. The burrows were about 20 feet from the nearest nests, and contained a little grass at the ends, but apparently had no occupants at that time.