

## BREEDING OF THE RED-BILLED GULL.

By Major G. A. Buddle, Auckland.

Referring to C. A. Fleming's preliminary census of the Mokohinau colony of red-billed gulls (*Larus novaehollandiae*) in 1944 (vide N.Z. Bird Notes, vol. 2, p. 27) in company with Major R. A. Wilson I spent six days at Mokohinau during the 1945 breeding season (Nov. 21st to 27th) and have the following observations to make:



RED-BILLED GULL IN FLIGHT.

Photo G. A. Buddle.

By courtesy of "Weekly Press."

Group I.—Still the largest individual group and also the earliest to lay. About 15% of the nests had young, and I should judge that the earliest had hatched out about November 16 or 17. About 90% of the nests contained two eggs (or young); 1/2% had three eggs and the remainder 1 egg. Wastage had already started at this early stage, as a number of dead chicks were seen. There was a greater concentration of nests per square yard in this group than in any of the others, and my estimate was about 1500 nests.

Group II.—No comment.

Group III.—No comment.

Group IV. — Approximately 150 nests; no young hatched. Several white-fronted terns (*Sterna striata*) nesting on the edge of this colony.

Group V.—Had moved nearer to Group X and almost joined up with it. The first young of this group hatched 23/11/45; about 600 nests.

Group VI.—About 100 nests.

Groups VII. and IX.—Were continuous and almost joined up with VIII. which had increased considerably in size. No count was made of nests in these areas, but on the basis of concentration of nests per square yard in other areas, the nests would number in the vicinity of 4000.

Group XI.—A small colony not mentioned by Fleming, on outlying rocks east of the landing and opposite Group IV; about 75 nests (one of which contained four eggs, probably two eggs of two females, as one pair of eggs was of different shape from the other).

The above figures give a breeding population of about 13,000 birds; somewhat higher than Fleming's count.

No immature birds were seen in the area. I visited Mokohinau in November, 1936, and although, owing to bad weather, the visit was brief, I noticed that Colony IV. at that time was very much larger and a

continuous colony occupied the cliff top from the landing place westward and northward to and possibly beyond the two indentations shown on Fleming's map half way up the west coast of the island. No count was possible, but the area occupied was about the equivalent of that now occupied on the north coast, of the island.

I visited the island again on August 6, 1946; no red-billed gulls were seen in the vicinity.

Oliver ("N.Z. Birds," p. 268) states that the habit of nesting at the same place every second year only has been observed at Mokohinau; on this occasion the statement does not hold good.

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STOAT WITH STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*).—At the Okoia deviation, 15/4/46, a large "stoat" (or other mustellid) was surprised carrying in its mouth an adult starling which it dropped. The starling was still moving but died almost immediately. At the time large flocks of starlings were feeding on the rushy flats of the Matarawa nearby, and the "stoat" had presumably caught one on the ground.—C. A. Fleming, Wellington.

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YEAR'S RECORD OF SONG OF HEDGE SPARROW (*Prunella modularis*) from garden, 30 Stonelaw Tee., Dunedin: Last record summer song, Jan. 17, 1945. Though an occasional song was heard at Purakanui on April 1, the next recorded song from the garden was on May 3. Wing-flicking noted May 6. From May 16 occasional songs were heard almost daily. In July there was a slight increase in song, and by the beginning of August the birds seemed to have reached the peak of their singing, a slight decrease being noticed at the end of the month. During August much wing-flicking and chasing was recorded. In October there was a marked decrease in song, and the last song recorded for the season was January 6. On December 9 two phrases of song were heard at 9.40 at night.—Mrs. I. Tily, Dunedin.

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NEST SITE COMPETITION BETWEEN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) and SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*).—On April 29, 1945, the entrance to a garden nesting box was made too small for starlings to enter. They continued to visit the box, and as far as my observation went, tried vainly to enter it. On June 7th, house sparrows which had previously been driven out by the starlings, took a returning interest in the boxes, but starlings repeatedly drove them away. On July 12 a female sparrow carried straw to the lower flat, and a male to the top one. Then began a contest between two very determined types of birds, and through August, September and October the sparrows carried material into the box and the starlings thrust in their heads and took out the material. The contest continued, but with less zest, through November and December and no sparrow succeeded in building a nest and lay. Often a sparrow would attack a starling, usually when it had its head in the entrance hole, or a starling would attack a sparrow. A male black-bird (*Turdus merula*) sometimes perched near and watched events with keen interest. On March 21 the starling had resumed the task of taking out straw, and in April the sparrows and starlings had returned to their old disputes at the nesting box, which was cleaned out and washed on April 16.—Mrs. I. Tily, Dunedin.