

## BLACKBIRD STUDY.

By Bruce Robertson, Form II., Hakataramea School.

This study of the blackbird (*Turdus merula*) covers the 1946 breeding season:—

When was the nest started and where?—October 8, on a clay bank near a prunus tree, about 7 feet from ground level, about a chain from the main school doors.

When was the nest finished?—On October 11. Mud was placed in the nest on October 10 and grass over the mud on October 11. The cock bird appeared to do most of the nest building.

Size, shape and material of nest; give description.—Cup-shaped; inside diameter about 4 inches; made of dry grass, grass roots, straw, mud and yarrow stalks.

When were the eggs laid?—First egg laid 14/10/46. Bird on nest 45 minutes. Hen accompanied by cock bird to nest. Cock bird stayed close to the nest. Second egg 15/10/46. Bird on nest 9.35 to 10.15. Third egg, 16/10/46; fourth egg, 17/10/46.

Number and Description of Eggs.—Four eggs, greenish-blue with reddish-brown spots; about three-quarters of an inch long.

Time of incubation.—Three eggs hatched 30/10/46 (13 days).

Time fledglings were in the nest.—Birds left nest 11/11/46 (12 days). The hen bird kept the nest clean and cleared out most of the droppings.

Food of young and adults.—Worms, insects, grubs, etc. By using field glasses we established that the birds definitely help to control insect pests. Large numbers of caterpillars were eaten.

How often were they fed?—Forty times in four hours (both birds). Hours observed: 10 a.m. to noon and 1 to 3 p.m.

Part taken by cock bird: One, in building the nest?—Appeared to do most of the building. Two: Incubation?—No part taken. Three: Care and feeding of young?—Fed both young and hen bird while she was on the nest. Both birds fed nestlings.

Was the nest used for a second brood in the same season?—No second brood. A pair inspected the nest but did not use it. Another nest was built close by apparently by the same pair.

From your observations give reasons for saying the bird is harmful or otherwise.—Useful in helping to control insect pests.

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BIRD OBSERVATION IN WELLINGTON.—In the middle of May, 1947, a harrier (*Circus approximans*) soared over my house in Beauchamp Street, Karori. It appeared to have come from the direction of Makara, and turned south-east over Karori. It was being constantly attacked by three magpies (*Gymnorhina hypoleuca*) which seemed to have no trouble in flying much faster than the harrier. One magpie left the group when the harrier turned south; but the two remaining magpies kept up their attacks and disappeared with the harrier.—W. J. Phillipps, Wellington.

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Dr. W. R. B. Oliver, who retired recently from the position of Director of the Dominion Museum, Wellington, has been appointed Acting-Director of the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch.