

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GANNET CENSUS.

VI.—MAHUKI GANNETRY, GREAT BARRIER.

By W. M. Hamilton.

On December 27, 1946, a party of five (Drs. C. P. McMeekan and H. Morrison and Messrs. N. Hamilton, A. Trotter and the writer) visited the gannetry at Great Barrier. The gannetry is situated on the north-west point of the island known locally as Gannet Island and shown on the Admiralty Chart as Mahuki, the most south-westerly of the Broken or Pig Islands. Anvil Island is a large stack lying close to the south-west of Mahuki. The latter is 180 acres in extent and rises to an estimated height of 400 feet. It is stated to be Native land without individual title. A small flock of sheep and one or two head of cattle are grazed on the island.

Owing to strong westerly winds the party landed on the eastern side of the island and proceeded overland to the gannetry. As soon as we appeared in sight of the colony, at a distance of 300-400 yards, the birds (estimated at 600-700) took to the wing, only twenty or so remaining on nests. A small number of sheep and lambs, startled by our approach, also ran out on to the gannetry, so we sat on the ridge and waited until the sheep left the colony and the majority of the gannets (*Morus serrator*) gradually returned (perhaps 30 minutes).

As soon as we started down the slope towards the colony the gannets again took flight only some twenty remaining and a number of these flew off as we approached. The birds were obviously very scared and quite abnormal in behaviour. The birds would not return while we remained on the colony and since none of the ridges command the whole colony a count could not be made. The numbers were estimated at 300-350 breeding pairs. This estimate was later confirmed by Mr. R. Cooper, of Port Fitzroy, who estimated the normal population at 300 pairs (not based on count).

The gannetry contained one chick (partly feathered) and 50 new-laid eggs. In view of this very discontinuous distribution of eggs and chicks and particularly in view of the very peculiar behaviour of the gannets themselves it appeared to us that the colony had been raided, probably between December 20-23, and all eggs and chicks removed.

One member of the party (N.H.) made a further visit to the colony approximately a month later and found only one egg (being incubated) and no chicks at all.

The colony could easily be fenced to prevent the ingress of stock and this would probably suffice to deter casual visitors from entering the colony. Less than one chain of fencing would be necessary but some means would have to be devised to permit the young gannets to reach the grassy slopes of the island which normally form their exercise ground. There may be legal difficulties in declaring the area a sanctuary and fencing as suggested, but it is urged that some such steps are necessary if the colony is to be preserved.

VII.—NEW GANNETRY OFF KARAKA POINT.

By G. A. Buddle.

A new gannetry has been discovered off Karaka Point, south of Hohoura and north of Doubtless Bay, North Auckland. Gannets (*Morus serrator*) were nesting on two small rocks about a mile off Karaka Point

in January, 1947; according to local fishermen this is the first season they have actually nested there. Landing was not possible owing to a heavy swell but I counted about 30 birds sitting

VIII.—GANNETS OF THE THREE KINGS.

By G. A. Buddle.

This report is a preliminary estimate of the gannet (*Morus serrator*) population of the Three Kings group made during a short visit from January 3 to 6, 1947. An accurate census as outlined in the instructions for 1946-47 census would entail an elaborate and costly expedition. At least five landings on separate islands or rocks would be necessary. These landings in all cases would be hazardous, not to say dangerous, and would be limited to certain combinations of weather and tide; while it is probable that not more than one landing a day would be feasible. Therefore an expedition with a mother ship would probably have to lay off the group for at least a fortnight to complete the task. Any proposal to base a camp on Great Island and make use of a dinghy and outboard^d for visiting the various gannetries would be inviting disaster and should not be considered.

South-West King.—This island is roughly triangular in shape, rising to a height of 607 feet at the north and west end, with precipitous cliffs sloping gradually to a low point about 50 feet in height at the southern end. Here a reasonable landing can be made under suitable conditions of tide and weather, and the cliffs climbed to the commencement of the gradual slope, the lower parts of which are covered by a large colony of red-billed gulls (*Larus novaehollandiae*); the slope is bounded on the east by a cliff along the edge of which the gannet colony is situated. It comprises a bare strip of sloping rock 5 to 20 yards in width, with dense scrub of karamu and ngaio, kawakawa, etc., at the back. It is split into four sections by intrusions of the scrub to the cliff edge; the lower one contained ten nests, the second 20, and the third and fourth together about 150, making a total of 180 nests or eggs.

In this colony (3/1/47) there was one young with a few mottled feathers and six downy young. A good number of nests or eggs appeared to have been destroyed or deserted. I considered that, in view of the number of birds circling in the area, there should have been a much greater number of occupied nests.

Some distance round the cliffs to the west was another small colony of about 20 nests, and still further to the north-west, high up on a cliff ledge (both inaccessible) was another of the same size. This makes a total of 220 nests, but I should put the gannet population of the island at a minimum of 750 birds, considering the number wheeling and circling in the area. This colony has the appearance of being on the increase. In the upper sections the birds are gradually increasing the nesting area by working back from the scrub, some of the occupied nests being at least 15 feet in from the edge of the cover, which is, in this area, mostly kawakawa and karamu.

Princes Islands.—This group of rocks presents great difficulty even in making an estimate. There are at least four colonies on isolated rocks, and in all cases they are intermingled or at least adjoining red-billed gull colonies, and in normal weather it is difficult to approach close enough to determine the areas even with the aid of field glasses.