

PLATE VIII.



Photo: W. P. Mead.  
SPOONBILLS AT WAITOTARA, 23rd OCTOBER, 1946.

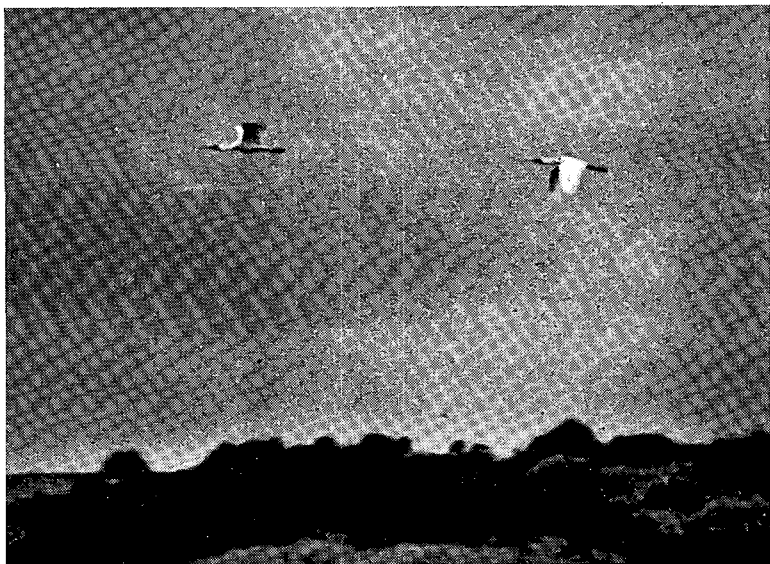


Photo: W. P. Mead.  
SPOONBILLS IN FLIGHT, WAITOTARA, 23rd OCTOBER, 1946.

## ROYAL SPOONBILL IN NEW ZEALAND.

By R. H. D. Stidolph, Masterton.

There is some evidence that the royal spoonbill (*Platalea regia*), hitherto regarded as an irregular visitor to New Zealand from Australia has bred in this country in recent years. First recorded in New Zealand in 1861, odd birds have been seen at intervals, according to published records, until about 1934; there are six such occurrences.

On November 20, 1943, in company with Mr. A. S. Wilkinson, a visit was paid to the mouth of the Manawatu River, near Foxton. Four large white birds, seen in the distance standing on the bank of the river, were at first thought to be white herons (*Casmerodius albus*) but a closer inspection showed them to be royal spoonbills. They were preening their feathers and on being disturbed, flew to a snag projecting from a fairly extensive mudflat and settled on it.

In May, 1946, four royal spoonbills appeared at Lake Ellesmere, Canterbury (R. A. Falla). At that time the four formerly recorded near Foxton were not to be seen in that locality. Later, only three birds were reported in the Lake Ellesmere area, and they were seen there until some time in June. Three birds were seen again at Foxton on July 15, 1946 (K. A. Wodzicki). Residents stated that three were there on October 24, 1947, but on October 25, only one bird was to be seen when I visited the locality in company with several other members of the Ornithological Society.

The spoonbill has been recorded also from coastal localities north and south of the Manawatu River. Residents of the Ohau River mouth reported two birds as inhabiting that locality in 1942 and 1943. In 1944 it is stated that a young one, with fluff still on its head, was in company with the two adults. This was reported independently by two residents of that locality. Further, Mr. A. E. Sands, of Foxton Beach, reports two royal spoonbills being seen there in 1944 with two smaller young birds. He was positive the latter were young ones.

Occurrences north of the Manawatu have been recorded at the Waitotara Estuary, where one was seen in the whitebait season, 1945, by Messrs. Mills and MacGregor, and on October 23 and 28, 1946, two were seen in the same locality. (W. P. Mead.) These latter birds were photographed by Mr. Mead. (See this issue.)

There is insufficient evidence to indicate whether or not these recent occurrences all refer to the same or different birds; the maximum number seen at one time was four.

Apart from these records, odd birds have been recorded in recent years at Stewart Island, 1943, and Manakau Harbour, 1945, both winter occurrences. (N.Z. Bird Notes.)

There is no doubt that the royal spoonbill is mistaken frequently for the white heron and it is possible that actual occurrences of the former species are more numerous than hitherto has been supposed. There is no reason to confuse these two species provided a good view is obtained, as in addition to its remarkable spoon-shaped bill, the spoonbill flies with its neck extended, whereas the heron's is retracted. The spoonbill has a noticeably different stance from that of the heron, holding its body much more horizontally and having a lankier appear-

ance about the legs. When feeding, the spoonbill moves its head and bill from side to side with a scythe-like motion, as it walks slowly forward in shallow water.

## HABITS OF SHINING CUCKOO.

By ROSS H. MICHIE, Kaitaia.

I heard the first shining cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*) on the morning of September 25, 1947 at about 10.30, flying over, making a flight call, a drawn-out "wheeo," at intervals. It was not until October 2 (a week later) that I heard the next. From that day on they have been seen and heard almost daily.

The long-tailed cuckoo (*Eudynamis taitensis*) is seldom seen or heard about here, and I think this applies to North Auckland generally. Although always on the watch for it, I have only seen one bird here in 26 years, and heard it on four or five occasions, the last being in a piece of bush in the vicinity of Pandora (Spirits Bay) in October, 1946. The comparative absence of this bird about here is possibly because there are no whiteheads (*Mohoua albicilla*) in the North, this being the bird on which the long-tailed cuckoo usually shoulders the responsibility of bringing up its family.

When I was a boy I found two nests of the grey warbler (*Pseudogerygone igata*) each containing a shining cuckoo's egg, and two nests containing a cuckoo chick in each.

About nine years ago at about 8 o'clock on a summer morning I was carrying my cream out to the road when I noticed a shining cuckoo sitting on the fence apparently trying to swallow something too large for it. I stopped immediately and watched. It sat there for about a minute jerking its head back, with its beak pointing almost straight up. It then deliberately dropped something and flew away. On investigating I found it was a fresh egg of a chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*) that it had sucked. A second experience occurred about two years later. Within a chain of our house is a small native bush reserve fringed with a little tea-tree, about an acre and a half in all. One morning I noticed a shining cuckoo sitting on a small teatree about three feet from the ground, going through the same performance as already described. After a minute or so it dropped the shell and flew away. I found that it had sucked a grey warbler's egg, and within a few inches of this eggshell was another which had apparently been sucked the day before or prior to that. The inside of the shell was perfectly dry. The cuckoo had evidently found the same twig a convenient place on each occasion. I made a thorough search for the warbler's nest without success. I have no recollection of anyone having seen a shining cuckoo sucking eggs.

Do cuckoos return to the same locality each year? A few years ago a cuckoo that frequented our bush reserve for a few months had a variation in its song. It would give about half a dozen of its "cooing" notes in the usual way, then step up an octave, starting off with the "coooo" on the higher note of the previous "coooo" and carrying on till breaking into the "wheeo, wheeo" of the latter part of its song. This song was repeated over a period of two or three months. The following season we heard the same kind of song for a similar period and presumed it would be the same bird. We have not heard it since.