

## BIRD NOTES FROM MAHIA PENINSULA.

By W. J. Phillipps, Wellington.

Mahia Peninsula, Hawke's Bay, has now become largely denuded of native bush. From early settlers I understand that heavy bush was the rule in most regions before the advent of the Europeans. Tawa was one of the main elements in this bush, but also in smaller numbers were totara, hinau and a large variety of other native trees. Bird life was abundant, but has gradually decreased until now birds are relatively rare over the large pastoral areas.

Recently, in November, 1947, I was enabled to visit Mahia and noted the increased pasturage, new roads and settlements since my last visit in 1924. Birds are common only on the block known as Moutere, where Mr. G. E. Ormond has established a small bush reserve on his own property. In this reserve the pigeon (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) and tui (*Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*) have become very plentiful. Mr. Ormond tells me that on one occasion in 1946 he counted sixteen pigeons close to his home, which is about half a mile from the bush reserve. On the lawn near the house may be seen at intervals the blackbird (*Turdus merula*), the thrush (*T. ericetorum*) and the Californian quail (*Lophortyx californicus*). In the small reserve may also be seen both the long-tailed (*Eudynamis taitensis*) and the shining cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*), as well as numerous pied fantails (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*). Yellowhammers (*Emberiza citrinella*) and an odd magpie (*Gymnorhina* sp.) occupy trees in the vicinity; but the magpie is generally rare on Mahia. Two of the most common birds in the area are the myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) and the sparrow (*Passer domesticus*).

Mr. Ormond tells me that there is no record of the kiwi (*Apteryx australis*) ever having been seen on Mahia. Up to the year 1907 the weka (*Gallirallus greyi*) was particularly abundant in several localities, in particular on the Moutere block. After this date the weka declined in numbers at an alarming rate until now it is generally considered to be extinct. Late last century the peacock (*Pavo cristatus*) said to have been introduced by the early whalers became very common on the Mahia block which includes the site surveyed for Mahia township. In this connection I have lately received a letter from Mr. Guy Ormond, Mahia. He writes, under date January 1, 1948: "Peacocks are now confined to a portion of my property called Te Hoe. They have been here over half a century. At one period, about 25 years ago, they were scattered over a block of more than a thousand acres and were quite plentiful. Now, owing to the depredations of shooters in search of pigs and deer, the numbers would be between ten and twenty. Five years ago they were shot down to one cock and two hens, but I have prevailed on shooters to leave them alone. They are now on the increase again. I notice the following birds still in the bush: Pigeon, tui, kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*) and two small lots of what we used to call 'native quail'—small brown birds, living near Terapikia." [The latter would be the Australian quail (*Synoicus ypsilophorus*).—Ed.]

In several swampy areas not far from the sea, a few pukeko (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) may be seen, while on the numerous streams which run to the sea an occasional bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*) is noted; but in general the bittern is said to be relatively rare compared with the condition some years ago. According to Mr. P. H. McKay, the grey duck (*Anas platyrhynchos*) is fairly common in some localities on the northern side of the peninsula, while the mallard (*A. platyrhynchos*) is much rarer. The same informant tells me that the black shag (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) is numerous, but that the white-throated species (*P. melanoleucus*) is rare. On lagoons near estuaries, Mr. McKay states that the black swan (*Cygnus atratus*) is not uncommon; also the white-headed stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*), and the red-billed gull (*Larus novaehollandiae*). The blue heron (*Demigretta sacra*) is also to be seen around the coast.