

BIRD LIFE ON WEST COAST, SOUTH ISLAND.

I.—NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF REEFTON.

By W. J. Phillipps, Wellington.

These notes refer to the years 1881-85 (inclusive). They were supplied to me by Mr. J. Patterson, of Wellington, retired. Mr. Patterson has always retained a considerable interest in bird life and his comments are of more than passing interest. The most common birds of the bush areas between Reefton and Greymouth were at this time kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*), parrakeets (some with red feathers on the head (*Cyanoramphus novaeseelandiae*) and some with yellow (*C. auriceps*), tui (*Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*) and pigeons (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*). The settlers appear in general to have been interested in bird life. This interest was not wholly economic, for many residents kept one or more bush birds in cages in much the same manner as we of today keep imported birds. Some of these bush birds were caged from infancy and many lived for several years.

The leading aviarist of Reefton was Mr. Joe Lawson. He experimented with keeping many of the rarer types of native birds; but the results of his experiments are lost to us. Suffice to say that the fashion of keeping native birds became almost universal in Reefton.

Mr. Patterson tells me that tui, parrakeet, kaka and bush canaries (*Mohoua o. ochrocephala*) were the most common cage birds. Parrakeets were readily taught to talk, while tui were also trained to speak. Bush canaries had a pleasing whistle when trained. Less common in cages were black and white tomtits (*Petroica m. macrocephala*), kingfishers (*Halcyon sanctus*), robins (*Miro australis*) and bell birds (*Anthonis melanura*). The cages were made from gin cases (J.D.K.Z.). Battens was usually secured across the front; only a few residents being able to secure wire netting.

This was the coaching period and Reefton was relatively a populous town. The most important stop for coaches prior to entering Reefton was the accommodation house of Mr. G. Baitari, Little Grey (Mawheraiti) approximately 20 miles from Reefton. It was here that the road-weary coach passengers descended daily for a mid-day meal, the chief feature of which was a bird pie of kaka, parrakeet or pigeon. These pies achieved considerable local fame during this period and large numbers of birds must have been shot or trapped to keep up the supply. About this time kaka began to become less abundant. Dr. Thorpe, of Reefton, introduced rabbits and Californian quail (*Lophortyx californicus*) into the district about 1882 and the latter quickly increased in numbers, probably replacing some of the kaka which had found their way into the pies of the early settlers.

The shining cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*) was common in the bush in summer. It was called zebra bird or rain bird by the settlers, the latter name being given because of a common belief that when the shining cuckoo whistled at night rain was sure to follow, surely a superfluous prophecy in a rainy area. The slaughter yards of Reefton were situated a little distance from the town near some heavy bush. Here shooting parties would hide in the trees near at hand to pick off the parrakeets. These birds came to feast on the fat off the carcasses of animals or their skins hung out in that vicinity.

Common bush birds, apart from those already mentioned, were tomtits, wrens (? species), native thrushes (*Turnagra capensis*), black and pied fantails (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*) and creeper (*Finschia novaeseelandiae*). Robins were common and were loved by all because of their trustfulness. Bush hawks (*Falco novaeseelandiae*), kingfishers and pukeko (*Porphyrio poliocephalus*) were also common, while weka (*Gallirallus australis*) were abundant. Less common were the saddle-back (*Creadion carunculatus*) and rifleman (*Acanthisitta chloris*). Mr. Patterson saw no kea (*Nestor notabilis*), kiwi (*Apteryx* sp.) or kakapo (*Stripogs habroptilus*); so the two latter may have been exterminated

before 1881. The native crow (*Calleas c. cinerea*) was also unknown around Reefton during this period. Morepork (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*) were abundant at night. Mention might also be made of the bats (presumably the long-tailed species) which in the evenings at dusk invaded the streets of Reefton feeding on night insects.

II.—BIRDS IN INANGAHUA DISTRICT.

By L. J. Bell, Rotokuhu, Inangahua Valley.

According to my experience, which extends over a period of more than fifty years, as a survey hand, and later as a surveyor, a bushman and a bush farmer with almost every weekend for nearly 60 years spent in the bush, the best time for native birds and native flora is from October 10 to the end of November.

In October the native trees are coming into bloom and the young birds are leaving the nest. The weather is usually very patchy in October with a lot of rain, and September is very wet.

Sixty years ago we had many native birds which are now almost unknown. Kiwis we had in hundreds. They have almost disappeared. Their call, like the note of a tram conductor's pea whistle, could be heard from almost every bush gully in the district. Now one is rarely heard. One of my sons saw one—a large silver-grey bird in April, 1947. We kept one as a pet when I was a lad.

Kakapos were plentiful in the limestone foothills and in the silver pine pakihis. They were seldom seen as they are night birds, as their name implies. We caught them. They are practically extinct in these parts.

The native thrush, the saddleback, the native crow, the teal duck and blue or mountain whistling duck (*Hymenolaimus malacorhynchus*) were here but I have not seen them for many years now. I think it is quite safe to say that stoats and weasels have destroyed them as one sees these pests even at the heads of creeks and on the hill tops.

The birds you can be assured of seeing in the Inangahua district are: Bush robins, tuis, koromakos, grey warblers (*Pseudogerygone igata*), fantails, pigeons, wekas, tomtit, waxeyes (*Zosterops lateralis*), kingfishers and black shags (*Phalacrocorax carbo*).

Birds you may see are: Riflemen, fern birds (*Bowdleria punctata*), kakas, long-tailed cuckoos (*Eudynamis taitensis*) and shining cuckoos in season.

I have seen many flocks of waxeyes in the dense bush this winter (1947). I counted over 60 in one flock on June 28. They seem to be here all the year round.

III.—BIRDS IN SOUTH WESTLAND AND WESTERN OTAGO.

The following record of bird life was made by Mrs. P. L. Moore, of the Dunedin Naturalists' Field Club while with a tramping party in South Westland and Western Otago:—

Makarora to Haast, December 26 to 31, 1946.—Riflemen, numerous (the commonest native bush bird seen throughout the whole of the tramping trip); grey warblers, a few noted; pipits, noted at Cameron's Flat, Dec. 26; fantails, about two dozen noted, all black; bellbirds, tuis, pigeons and grey ducks (*Anas poicilorhyncha*), numerous; paradise ducks (*Tadorna variegata*), adult and young noted; morepork, one seen, but calls heard every night throughout the trip; keas, about four dozen noted going down the Haast on Dec. 27; parrakeets, young yellow-fronted with adults; pukeko, adult and young numerous at Haast, Dec. 27; black oystercatchers (*Haematopus ?sp.*), going down the Haast about three pairs.

Haast to Jackson's Bay, Dec. 30.—From Haast to the coast bird life was not plentiful but a few tomtits, pigeons, bellbirds and keas were

noted. At Jackson's Bay many white-fronted terns (*Sterna striata*) and red-billed gulls (*Larus novaehollandiae*) were seen. Moreporks were again heard at night.

Jackson's Bay, Dec. 31, 1946, to Big Bay, Jan. 7, 1947.—Riflemen, again numerous; fantails and bellbirds, numerous; grey warblers, tomtits and grey ducks, a few; paradise ducks, seen but in fewer numbers, one egg found; shining cuckoo, occasional calls; long-tailed cuckoo, frequently heard; pied and black oystercatchers, coast to Martin's Bay, about 10 pairs of each, also two birds believed to be hybrids, were black with white under wings and tail, three oystercatcher's eggs were found. blue or reef heron (*Demigretta sacra*), about 4; black shags, 2; black-backed gulls (*Larus dominicanus*), with young.

Big Bay to Martin's Bay, Jan. 8-9.—Gulls, black-backed; oystercatchers, a few black and pied; paradise ducks and tomtits, several; bellbirds, many; moreporks, calls at night; black swans (*Cygnus atratus*), approximately 200 in one locality.

Martin's Bay to Hollyford, Jan. 10-15.—Tuis, plentiful; bellbirds, in numbers but less noticeable than the tuis; paradise and grey ducks, noted but not numerous; grey warblers, a few; parrakeets, again all identified were yellow-fronted; long-tailed cuckoo, calls heard repeatedly all the way; riflemen and pigeons, very plentiful; yellowheads (*Mohoua o. ochrocephala*) seen in small numbers in several localities; kakas, not seen until near Marion on Jan. 14, were not seen at all at Deadman's on the previous day; two years ago, kakas were common at Deadman's, but at time trampers with rifles were shooting them.

BIRDS OF KAINGAROA FOREST.

By H. R. Kyder, Kaingaroa.

During the course of my work in the Forestry Service, I have gathered the following notes on birds in the Kaingaroa Forest area:—

Black Shag (*Phalacrocorax carbo*).—Parties of two, three and odd birds noticed along the Rangitaiki River, 15/12/47.

Bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*).—An odd one to be seen and heard at night in the swamps at Waireka, near the main Te Whaiti-Rotorua Road.

Grey Duck (*Anas poicilorhyncha*).—Flock of 23 counted on a lagoon in the plantation near Hangowahine Lookout. Several birds were seen along the banks of the Rangitaiki River.

Bush Hawk (*Falco novaeseelandiae*).—Odd ones to be seen throughout the forest. One made a din whenever we went near a tree on which it was perched. An examination revealed a nest in which were four eggs. I noticed with interest that beside the nest on the ground were the remains of the previous year's nest, still in good shape, giving one the impression that the birds return to nest in the same place each year.

Harrier (*Circus approximans*).—Large numbers are to be seen in the forest. No doubt this can be explained by the large number of deer and pig carcasses left lying about by the deer cullers and private hunters during the winter months.

Californian Quail (*Lophortyx californicus*).—Flocks of as many as 30 can be seen practically anywhere in the forest.

Pukeko (*Porphyrio poliocephalus*).—Odd birds and occasional parties of from five to six to be seen along the Rangitaiki River.

Pigeon (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*).—Odd birds about the edge of the native bush on the foothills of the Urewera Country, along the eastern boundary of the exotic plantation.

Shining cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*).—First of season seen and heard October 2, 1947, at Waireka. At this time it is to be seen along the eastern boundary of the forest near Te Awa.

Long-tailed Cuckoo (*Eudynamis taitensis*).—First seen at Te Awa on December 15, 1947. Two were seen and heard giving their long drawn-