

BIRD LIFE NEAR LAKE HAUROKO, SOUTHLAND.

By Dunedin Naturalists' Field Club.

On October 25 and 26, 1947, three members of the Dunedin Naturalists' Field Club were in a small party that visited Lake Hauroko, Southland. Mrs. P. L. Moore, a member both of the O.S.N.Z. and the D.N.F.C., kept bird records which she passed on to the bird recorder of the D.N.F.C. and from which this report has been compiled.

From the end of the road in the Lillburn Valley there is a nine miles' walk to the lake. The first five miles of the track passes through more or less open country with scattered patches of scrub, but the last four miles is through beech forest. Most of the bird life was noted when the party stopped for rests or to "boil the billy."

In the Lillburn Valley and during the nine-mile walk to Lake Hauroko, twenty harriers (*Circus approximans*) were counted. At a stream which is crossed at the entrance to the forest, two kingfishers (*Halcyon sanctus*) were noted.

Birds seen in the forest were: Five yellow-breasted tits (*Petroica m. macrocephala*), one black fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*), three robins (*Miro australis*), one pigeon (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*), and at the lake two keas (*Nestor notabilis*). Birds heard but not seen were the rifleman (*Acanthisitta chloris*), grey warbler (*Pseudogerygone igata*), bellbird (*Anthornis melanura*) and kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*).

Three blackbirds (*Turdus merula*) were the only introduced birds recorded during the walk.

NOTES ON BLACK-BACKED GULL.

By E. W. Hursthouse, Mahina Bay.

As the common and majestic black-backed gull (*Larus dominicanus*) does not appear to have received much attention the following notes may be of interest and induce others to make a study of this bird. My notes, based on observations extending over several years, are confined almost entirely to two pair—permanent residents of about 100 yards of sandy and rocky beach opposite my home in Mahina Bay. This bay is on the eastern side of Port Nicholson, Wellington. Other birds are about when fishermen are netting or when food is thrown out, otherwise only these two pairs remain.

The cock birds of these two pairs, in a peculiar and interesting action (a similar action has been noted on other beaches) stand opposite each other at a distance of 12 to 18 inches, pick up a pebble or piece of seaweed, cast it down, approach and retire in the manner of a challenge. Of the many times I have seen this, not once has the challenge been taken up. When first noted it was during the courting period and I surmised that it was in some way connected with courtship, but as this action occurs at any time of the year it has the appearance of some form of game. It is not confined to the shore as I have seen it happening well out in the water where the birds dip their bills in the water.

The love-making, as with many other birds, is preceded by much "billing" and "cooling" but in actual coition it may be different for in this case, after crossing bills several times, the hen stands firmly and the cock bird mounts her. In one case a bird remained there for the best part of one minute.

The nearest breeding colony in this district, as far as I am aware, is that in Fraser Bay, near Baring Lighthouse, some ten miles walk from here, or a three-mile walk after a motor trip of some 20 miles down the Wainui Road. I visited this locality many years ago in February and saw a number of young birds.

When the young birds are brought here I have been astonished at the total indifference of the parent bird to feeding them, for on nearly every

occasion when appealed to by the young bird for food the adult quietly walked away. Only on two occasions have I noted a bird giving any food and that I am certain was under protest. In trying to find food, the young bird is forced to experiment, for it will pick up anything that looks likely and in most cases discards it. At what age the young birds begin to recognise food I am unable to say.

As far as I can gather it is not until the second year that they attempt to learn the trick of gathering a shellfish and dropping it on the rocks, as on one occasion only have I seen a young bird pick up a small mussel, fly high, drop it in the water and fly down immediately to find nothing and rest on the water. I wonder what its thoughts were. It would seem that the young are not taught by the parents.

These birds are a constant source of interest and to see a good fight is a thrill. One fight I recall nearly resulted in the death of a bird. Two were fighting in the water near the rocks when one got the better of the other and kept it under water by diving at it, until, thinking this not very sporting I disturbed them. The half-drowned bird took some time to recover before flying away.

Occasionally in the late summer evening a number of birds may be seen high up flying in a large circle, the number gradually being reduced as each bird leaves for its night quarters.

SEA-BIRDS AT BANKS PENINSULA.

By Charles Lindsay, Wellington.

While on a yachting cruise to Akaroa from Lyttelton during late December, 1947, and early January, 1948, opportunity offered to observe marine birds and the following notes are the result:—

White-flipped Penguin (*Eudyptula albosignata*).—Only four penguins, almost certainly this species, were observed, two in Akaroa and two off the south coast of the peninsula near Pompey's Pillar. On one warm, dark night in Akaroa quite a number were heard calling to each other.

Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*).—This bird was scarce, two being recorded on the south side of the peninsula on January 9, and one off the north coast on the 10th.

Flesh-footed Shearwater (*Puffinus carneipes*).—Three birds believed to be this species were seen off Sleepy Bay on January 9. They were observed in flight from a short distance, when the flesh-coloured webs and light-coloured mandible were most noticeable. Banks Peninsula is south of the normal range of this bird, but specimens have been recorded as far south as Kaikoura.

Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*).—Nine mutton birds were noted on January 9 between Akaroa Head and East Head.

Fluttering Shearwater (*Puffinus gavia*).—About 20 individuals were counted on January 9 between Akaroa Head and East Head.

White-capped Mollmawk (*Thalassarche cauta*).—Eight mollmawks of this species were recorded on January 9 on the south coast and one off Okain's Bay on the northern side, on January 10.

Spotted Shag (*Stictocorbo punctatus*).—This was the commonest bird observed round the peninsula, but it is off the northern side where it is present in large numbers. On December 26 a large number was observed in close formation on the water. In extent this group of birds measured about 400 yards long by 50 to 60 yards wide: the number of birds must have been 3,000. At the time weather conditions were severe, with a north-west gale and rough seas. The birds appeared to be just resting, as none was noticed to dive in search of fish. On January 10, in fine weather, large numbers of this shag were observed in several groups from Okain's Bay to Lyttelton Heads; many were busy catching fish. A rough census estimated that 4000 to 5000 birds were present. On the south side of the peninsula only small numbers were noted, with several small breeding colonies near Pompey's Pillar. In Akaroa