LITTLE BARRIER ISLAND BIRDS IN WINTER.

By H. R. McKenzie, Clevedon.

Accounts of the birds on Little Barrier Island have mostly been made in spring and summer. This is, of course, owing to the advantages of the breeding season and the better weather conditions. I therefore considered a winter record to be desirable, so, having obtained the necessary permission from the Tourist Department, made a visit from June 23 to June 30, 1947, with my friend Mr. J. W. St. Paul. The weather in June was rough indeed, and we were fortunate to make the passage to and from the island in moderate seas, only one day late each way. No landing can be made on the boulders of the shore in heavy weather, or even in fine weather when the wind is strong. Mr. Norman Warren runs the fortnightly launch and special trips, and his co-operation and kindly consideration for our comfort were much appreciated.

The birds seen during the crossing will be described under a separate heading so that they will not be confused with those seen on the island, or from its shores.

It is not considered necessary to set out a description of the general characteristics of the island. This has already been very well done recently by Hamilton ("The Little Barrier Island," 1937) and to a considerable extent from the ornithological viewpoint by Turbott (N.Z. Bird Notes, Vol. 2, No. 5, July, 1947, "Birds of Little Barrier Island"). It is fully realised that some of my conclusions will probably be corrected in the future, but it is hoped that the work done will be useful in aiding those making further investigations.

At the landing we were cordially received by Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Parkin. I had already come to know and appreciate their great hospitality and their ready help in bird work when I stayed there on the Island in December, 1946, as a member of Mr. R. B. Sibson's party. As guardians of this island sanctuary they are not only conscientious and efficient, but are keenly interested in the birds and very appreciative of the motives of visitors who wish to study and protect the rich avifauna of this ornithological oasis.

The short time available, the limited daylight of the winter days and the prospect of some wet weather made it necessary to plan and work methodically.. Mr. St. Paul, an expert bushman and keen and efficient bird observer, worked the rougher country. He made two trips to the Summit, observing the distribution of the birds according to height. He also diligently patrolled the flat and the steep faces and ridges at either end of it. Mr. and Mrs. Parkin noted all the birds they saw in the period and also gave us much valuable information from their diaries and their island knowledge.

I worked the nearby gullies and ridges and the flat, also watching the sea. Each evening, by a great log fire, all notes were pooled and written up. On the last evening a special effort was made to estimate as closely as possible the population numbers of each species of bird in the areas worked. I feel that this system was a distinct success.

For what value it may have, this report depends largely on the accounts of Mr. E. G. Turbott and Mr. R. B. Sibson of their visits of October, 1945, and December, 1946, respectively, for making seasonal comparisons. This help is gratefully acknowledged.

NATIVE BIRDS OF THE ISLAND.

Kiwi **(Apteryx australis)**.—Several calls were heard at night but very few in relation to the number of birds on the island. The borings and droppings were so plentiful everywhere that a large population was quite evident. Fresh signs were seen in every gully and on every ridge and track. Mr. St. Paul found borings in plenty up to 2,000 feet. It had been considered previously that the high country was too hard for them, the ground being so rocky, but it now appears that there could quite easily be a population covering the whole island. The fact that they have

not been heard on the outer side means little, few people ever having been there at night to hear their calls. In any case, I know that many birds can be present without any calls being heard at all. I consider that birds could now be taken from the island to stock selected areas elsewhere. No attempt was made to look for kiwis at night, but a very fine large bird was found in a hollow log about half a mile up the Summit track.

Little Blue Penguin **(Eudyptula minor)**.—None was seen or heard on or near the island. They had been ashore in great numbers for the first three weeks of June when the weather was rough. It is their habit to flock ashore with great noise at the approach of heavy easterly weather. —(C.H.P.)

Black Petrel **(Procellaria parkinsoni)**.—On June 25 and 28, Mr. St. Paul made trips to the Summit. He found two cat-eaten remains on the track between the Thumb and the Summit. Exploring a ridge leading south from near the Summit, he found several dozen burrows, none of which had been used for some time. Here, eaten remains of six more birds were found. These fragments were very greasy and oily, which may indicate that they were young birds. This should have been the case owing to the season. Two birds still smelled considerably. No heads could be found but the wings and bones left no doubt as to the identity of the dead birds. One pair of wings brought down measured 34 c.m. The feathers were complete and beautifully glossy as of a young bird. Fragments of an egg which had apparently hatched were found at the mouth of a burrow.

Grey-faced Petrel **(Pterodroma macroptera)**.—The nesting area about Parihakoakoa Pa at the west end of the flat was explored by Mr. St. Paul. He found many burrows being used, and the characteristic strong musky smell at two burrows indicated sitting birds. On June 29, a bird newly eaten by a cat was found on the flat at the western end of the old sea-cliffs; wing 31 cm., bill 3.6. The plumage on the wings was perfect. On June 30, Mr. St. Paul found five cat-eaten remains about the top of the old sea-cliffs. One had only just been eaten. It had contained an egg which was broken and still wet on the inside. It is, therefore, evident that the wretched cats attack adult birds as they scramble to or from their burrows. They also take the young as they leave the nests in the summer. (Sibson, 1947.) This gives the species little chance and it must soon vanish from the island if the cat menace is not tackled on a large scale.

Sooty Shearwater or Muttonbird **(Puffinus griseus)**. — Mr. Parkin picked up a dead bird on the shore on approximately 20/5/47, and he kept it pending our visit. It was practically fresh when found. The measurements were:—Length, 44; wing, 31; bill, 4.6; tarsus, 5.2; tail, 10. The silver-white area under the wings was of maximum size for the species and it had been a fine specimen in life.

Fluttering Shearwater **(Puffinus gavia)**.—On three occasions these were seen off shore, once in hundreds, but they were not seen at all at other times.

Cook's Petrel **(Pterodroma cookii)**.—Only old remains were found on the nesting areas. (J.W.St.P.) No calls were heard and no living birds were seen.

Pied Shag **(Phalacrocorax varius)**.—The colony near Tirikakawa was well populated. No tally was obtained during the visit, but Mr. Parkin stated that the number had increased. Mr. Parkin has since advised that on 24/7/47 they had not commenced nesting, but on that day he had seen the whole party in circling flight. This he presumed to indicate a breeding tendency. Then on 1/8/47 some were sitting on nests and others carrying nesting material.

Gannet **(Moris serrator)**.—From the shore at my look-out post in front of the house, birds were seen on June 24, 25 and 27. They did not exceed three in number on any of these days.

Black-backed Gull **(Larus dominicanus)**.—The greatest number seen at once was four, one of which was immature. The population is certainly a small one.

Red-billed Gull **(Larus novaehollandiae)**.—Small flocks were seen flying past as follows: June 24, c. 20; June 29, 5; June 30, c. 30.

Pigeon **(Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae)**.—The numbers seen were greater than in December, 1946. (Sibson, 1947.) On June 25, one was seen at 1,600 feet on the Thumb Track, five along the top ridges, and one low on the Summit track. (J.W.St.P.) Three of these were feeding on miro. On June 28, five were seen on the Summit Track between 600 feet and 2,000 feet. (J.W.St.P.) Small flocks were scattered along the flat, feeding on white clover and pohuehue **(Muehlenbeckia australis)**. The population estimate of the flat and adjacent area was c. 60, with more in the gullies and on the higher country.

Harrier **(Circus approximans)**.—Single birds were seen on June 23 and 24. It is probable that they visit from the mainland and return in the one day. Against this probability, however, is the fact that one of these was sitting at dusk on the top of a green pohutukawa, (J.W.St.P.) as if intending to roost for the night.

Morepork **(Ninox novaeseelandiae)**.—A few calls were heard and one bird was seen on a punga in a gully.

Kaka **(Nestor meridionalis)**.—Seen and heard as follows:—June 23, none; 24th, one heard on Summit Track up to 650 feet, two seen from house; 25th, five to Summit via Thumb, none down Summit track (J. W. St. Paul), one heard at dawn and one at dusk behind house; 26th, one seen in manuka on Shag Track, one seen and one heard from house; 27th, three heard about house area; 28th, five to Summit via Summit Track (J.W.St.P.); 30th, one called at dawn near house. It was concluded that there were very few about the house area compared with December, 1946 (Sibson) and that they were scattered throughout the bush right to the highest point.

Red-fronted Parrakeet **(Cyanoramphus novaeseelandiae)**.—A few birds were seen and heard each day. Like the kaka, they were scattered everywhere right to the tops. Mr. St. Paul saw or heard three on the track to the Summit on June 25th, and on June 28 he saw ten and heard others high up. The old remains of one bird were found low down on the Summit Track. Two at this point approached closely and one chatted sociably.. It was so tame that it was at first thought to be "Sammy," the pet bird which roamed free from the house. However, Mrs. Parkin noticed that it had a full tail, whereas "Sammy" was short of one tail feather.

Kingfisher **(Halcyon sanctus)**.—At least one seen each day. Two together were seen at the house and single birds at Waipawa Stream and the east paddock. Mr. St. Paul saw none on his two trips to the Summit.

Rifleman **(Acanthisitta chloris)**.—Mr. St. Paul saw one at c 1,800 feet and two at c 1,200 feet on the Summit Track.

Grey Warbler **(Pseudogerygone igata)**.—Birds were seen and songs heard at all points about the flat and lower ridges and gullies. Strangely enough, Mr. St. Paul saw none on either of his two trips to the Summit. It was estimated that they were more plentiful than in December, 1946 (Sibson, 1947), but were on the whole less plentiful than on the mainland. Mr. Parkin had noted that there were a great many more in the spring of 1945 than at the same season in 1946.

White-breasted Tit **(Petroica macrocephala toitoi)**.—From the house garden to c. 2,000 feet some were seen and heard each day. It was noted that songs were heard at the fringe of the bush but not farther in. They are doubtless plentiful throughout the island.

Robin **(Miro australis)**.—Only two robins were seen and it would seem that they had retired to the shelter of the thick bush owing to the cold weather. In December, 1946, quite a few were seen in the fairly open lower parts of the gullies. Mr. St. Paul saw one near the Summit

on June 25. In "Grafton Gully" I saw one which I took to be a juvenile. The lower parts of its legs were flesh-coloured. It sang a little sub-song of three or four thin peeps and a canary-like trill, audible at only a few feet. It came within four feet of me but sang several times at six to eight feet. This was a truly delightful experience.

Fantail **(Rhipidura fuliginosa)**.—For the flat area, including the boulder bank and the fringe of the trees on the inland side, an estimate of 150 plus was agreed upon. This is a heavy population for sixty-odd acres. It would have been more readily understood if the rest of the island had been denuded of fantails, but this was not so. Mr. St. Paul saw eight up to 2,000 feet on the Summit Track in one trip, and they were equally plentiful at all other parts visited. In December, 1946, they were not at all plentiful. It would seem that they must at that time have been breeding in the gullies. In the June sunlight it was pretty to see such numbers of them hawking for flies over the shore boulders and even working out over the sea a little way.

Whitehead **(Mohoua ochrocephala albicilla)**.—These busy little creatures were everywhere from Titoki Point to the Summit and doubtless over the whole island. They were in small flocks of three to twelve, no larger groups being seen. Their varied songs and calls were heard all the time. One, probably owing to anger or alarm, made a call like a parrakeet.

Silvereye **(Zosterops lateralis)**.—Only a very few were to be found in the parts searched. It was agreed that the total would be 12 to 15.

Tui **(Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae)**.—From the shore to the highest tops the distribution was very even. The pohutukawa causes large numbers to assemble at the coast in summer, but the smaller and less profuse flowers of June cause them to scatter widely through the bush. A few fed at the syrup trough at the house but less than usual for the time of year. (C.H.P.)

Bellbird **(Anthornis melanura)**.—The distribution was practically the same as for the tui, except that a considerable number stayed about the house and fed eagerly on syrup provided for them. When replete, they loved to sun themselves on nearby branches and on a ladder which leaned against the house. One hardcase old cock would come into the porch and help himself from the main supply of syrup in a bucket. When the feeding trough became empty they all sang a certain song in request of more. Songs and calls of the daytime variety were plentiful but there was no dawn chorus of the gentle bells.

Stitchbird **(Notiomystis cincta)**.—No special effort was made to see stitchbirds but they were heard every day near the house, Mr. and Mrs. Parkin being adept at picking up their calls in the medley of bird sounds. Mr. St. Paul twice saw birds at c. 700 feet and one at c. 1,800 feet. A male in quite good plumage often visited a kohekohe tree near the house. This tree had lately been in full bloom and had attracted many stitchbirds.

INTRODUCED BIRDS ON THE ISLAND.

Chaffinch **(Fringilla coelebs)**.—The absence of song made it rather difficult to make a tally. Three single birds were seen, so they were certainly scarce. Mr. Parkin had noted more earlier. Mr. and Mrs. Parkin have never seen this species at any distance into the bush. This is odd in comparison with the mainland.

Sparrow **(Passer domesticus)**.—Fifty to sixty were constantly about the house. I once counted a flock of 35 feeding on the front lawn. Two birds were always to be seen near the grave along the flat.

Yellowhammer **(Emberiza citrinella)**.—It was estimated that the population of the flat, the only suitable area, would be c. 8. Mrs. Parkin saw a party of 14 on 17/7/47.

Thrush **(Turdus ericetorum)**.—Estimated number on flat c. 25. A party of eight seen flying by cowshed. Occasional song.

Blackbird **(Turdus merula)**.—Estimated number on flat c. 30. None singing.

Hedge Sparrow **(Prunella modularis).** — Estimated number about homestead 10/12. No song. Mrs. Parkin noted a party of five in the garden.

Skylark **(Alauda arvensis).**—Estimated number up to 15. On 23/6/47 three were seen flying low over the water from the direction of Little Barrier Island. They were about three miles from the mainland to which they were heading.

Starling **(Sturnus vulgaris).**—Flocks were frequently seen from six to fifty or so strong. The total was about sixty to seventy about the flat area, but starlings would be more likely to be all round the island than other introduced birds so there may have been more. Mr. St. Paul saw a single bird fly from the shore toward Leigh until lost to sight with binoculars. There is no doubt that they and the other small introduced birds cross the fifteen miles of sea readily. Mr. Parkin later reported flock of several hundreds on 22/7/47, evidently a strong flight from the mainland.

BIRDS RECORDED ON TWO RECENT VISITS (Turbott, October, 1945, and Sibson, December, 1946), BUT NOT FOUND IN JUNE, 1947.

Banded Rail **(Hypotaenidia philippensis).**
Shining Cuckoo **(Chalcites lucidus).**
Long-tailed Cuckoo **(Eudynamis taitensis).**
Yellow-fronted Parrakeet **(Cyanoramphus auriceps).**
Diving Petrel **(Pelecanoides urinatrix).**
White-fronted Tern **(Sterna striata).**
Greenfinch **(Chloris chloris).**
Goldfinch **(Carduelis carduelis).**—Mrs. Parkin saw two on 20/7/47, three weeks after the June, 1947, visit.
Pipit **(Anthus novaeseelandiae).**

BIRDS SEEN FROM THE SHORES OF THE ISLAND IN OCTOBER, 1945, and DECEMBER, 1946, BUT NOT IN JUNE, 1947.

Giant Petrel (**Macronectes giganteus).**
Flesh-footed Shearwater **(Puffinus carneipes).**
Buller's Shearwater **(Puffinus bulleri).**

BIRDS SEEN DURING THE CROSSINGS IN JUNE.

Giant Petrel **(Macronectes giganteus).**—Four seen at intervals.

Flesh-footed Shearwater **(Puffinus carneipes).**—Two seen quite closely about four miles from the island.

Buller's Shearwater **(Puffinus bulleri).**—One seen somewhat distantly. Identity not quite certain.

Fluttering Shearwater **(Puffinus gavia).**—23/6/47, several thousands extending all the way across. 30/6/47, a few scattered all the way.

Diving Petrel **(Pelecanoides urinatrix).**—Parties of two, five and two were seen close to Little Barrier, flying and also diving. The water was sufficiently rough to make them very active.

Black-browed Mollymawk **(Thalassarche melanophrys).**—23/6/47 five of these fine birds were seen, most of them within fifty yards of the launch. 30/6/47, one seen.

Little Blue Penguin **(Eudyptula minor).**—Not one was seen near the island, the recent heavy westerly weather having apparently driven them towards the mainland. They are usually to be found in what I call the "Penguin belt," a strip of water along the coast and from about two to four miles from it. In this area off the mainland we counted 25 from one side of the launch only.

Gannet **(Moris serrator).**—A few scattered right across.

White-fronted Tern **(Sterna striata).**—23/6/47, c. 100 near the mainland and two half way across.

Red-Billed Gull **(Larus novaehollandiae).**—23/6/47, a few right across. 30/6/47, c. 30 off Titoki Point, and odd ones all the way across.

Black-Backed Gull **(Larus dominicanus).**—Odd ones all the way.

An expedition of this nature often produces doubtful cases. Two are, I believe, worth recording so that they may help future observers.

On 24/6/47, I saw at sea from the island a flock of dark petrels, not visible to the eye, but plainly seen through a good telescope. They were all dark, no white under the wing, and feeding in a very loosely scattered flock, which stretched out of sight. They were certainly not flesh-footed shearwater, nor, if the absence of white under the wing could be taken as certain at such a distance, were they sooty shearwater. Neither of these species should have been present at the time. It seems that they most likely were grey-faced petrel working unusually close to land. Mr. P. C. Bull advises that the flock formation is characteristic. Also the species was nesting on the islands and the coast at the time.

Mr. St. Paul had a tantalising experience with a call which was exactly like that of a blue-wattled crow **(Calleas cinerea wilsoni)** but it was too distant to be sure and it was only heard twice. It came from away on the far side of Tirikakawa Valley, being heard from the old camp-site on the Summit Track. No tui call of this kind was heard during our stay. This call was the one known to us as the "organ and pipe." Mr. St. Paul is one of the best qualified men in New Zealand in regard to knowledge of this bird. As a boy he pelted them with clods as he went to school and except for his service in the 1914-18 war, he has lived among them ever since. Scarcely a week goes by without his seeing and hearing crows and he studies them closely. I may add that he is also a zealous guardian of the species in his district. I would, therefore, ask any future observers on Little Barrier Island who know the blue-wattled crow, to spend some time to find more definite evidence, even though the chances of success are probably poor. (c.f. Turbott, 1947.)

June 30 came all too soon and we sailed away on the "Gunner," sorry to be leaving this very heaven of birds, and sad, indeed, to leave those most wonderful friends, hosts and co-workers, Mr. and Mrs. Parkin of the island.

PIED STILT COLONY.

By Mrs. Olga Sansom, Invercargill.

On November 1, 1947, I visited a section of the Borstal Farm adjacent to the Oreti River, five miles from Invercargill, to see if the pied stilt **(Himantopus himantopus)** was nesting there. The locality is a river mouth with a bank of shingle, an area of rush and stunted silver tussock merging into marshy flats with a covering of shore gentian, a native buttercup (in flower), samolus and cotula (in flower), rush and big red tussock.

I counted 20 birds; they circled above me, swooped and yelped complainingly. It took me twenty minutes to find the first nest as I was searching amongst the stunted silver tussock, and only by good luck got out on to the shingle to make a detour, and there it was. I found five nests. Each nest was in a hollow in the shingle with hardly any nesting material, on the shore side of a single tussock a foot to 18 inches away from it. There were four eggs in each nest; they were all warm. When I found that the birds were sitting and how much more of an intruder I was than I had first thought, I made some brief and hurried notes and left.

On November 10, I set out from Invercargill to again visit the nests but did not get there owing to the collapse of my bicycle! However, on November 17 the position was: No. 1 nest: Two nestlings (no sign of other 2 eggs); No. 2 nest, ditto. No. 3 nest, 1 nestling (1 egg); No. 4 nest, 4 eggs (warm); No. 5 nest, empty. The perfect colour camouflage of the nestling was interesting. It looked as like the shingle as did the eggs. I counted 16 birds in the air. There may have been other nests, but although I searched I did not see any more. These five were within a radius of twelve yards. During the last two years a few pied stilts at least have been resident here on this estuary during the whole year.