

BIRD LIFE IN COLLIN'S VALLEY, WAKATIPU.

By Dunedin Naturalists' Field Club.

In January, 1948, a party of members from the Dunedin Naturalists' Field Club was kindly granted permission by Mr. Burnett, of the Cecil Peaks Station, to camp in his bunkhouse at Collin's Bay on the western shore of Lake Wakatipu to study the natural history of the locality. Twenty-one people availed themselves of this opportunity. The party left Dunedin by special bus at 8 a.m. on the morning of January 17, and from Kingston the trip was made on the "Earnslaw" to Collin's Bay, where we arrived in the early evening. The return trip was made on January 27.

Naturally, on excursions such as this, we look forward hopefully to seeing something of native bird life which is not to be found in our Dunedin gardens, nor seen on our fortnightly excursions, but, compared with our previous year's trip to the Dart and the Routeburn Valleys, bird life in the Collin's Valley was disappointing. This disappointment was attributed to two main causes. In the first instance, the areas of beech within three miles of our camp at Collin's Bay were confined to a few very narrow strips in gorges cut in the mountain sides by mountain streams, and consequently difficult to explore; and, in the second instance, to the presence of vermin in the nature of stoats, etc., the stoats being seen in considerable numbers.

NATIVE BIRDS.

A few notes on native birds were made from the bus as we travelled from Dunedin to Kingston. At Otokia two harriers (*Circus approximans*) were noted together in flight, and, before we were borne out of sight of them, one alighted on a high hawthorn hedge. Nearing Lovell's Flat another harrier was seen, and one between Lovell's Flat and Balclutha. From Balclutha to Clinton three were counted, and from Waipahi to Pukerau two. From Gore to Balfour the count was eight. Between Lumsden and Kingston, not more than six were seen. On January 20, during a walk of four miles from Kawarau Falls through Strath Gyle to Drift Bay, five harriers were counted. On January 25, in a stretch of about three miles up Collin's Valley, the count was four. While a party was in a strip of beech forest in Collin's River Gorge, a harrier was seen flying among the trees.

It was on the same day that some members of our party climbed one of the Cecil Peaks, and, about 2000 feet up near the edge of a strip of beech forest, saw two bush hawks (*Falco novaezeelandiae*). The birds were much excited by the presence of the climbers, and kept up a continual calling. One circled around, keeping well away, but the other approached to within 20 feet of the climbers. When a dislodged rock commenced to roll down the mountain side, it was chased by one of the birds. The rock broke into two pieces; the bird hesitated a moment, then continued its chase after one of the pieces.

On the way to Kingston three pukeko (*Porphyrio poliocephalus*) were in a swamp near Balfour. On January 20, we looked in vain for these birds at a large raupo-filled lagoon near Drift Bay between Peninsula Hill and the Remarkables, and decided that the dead one lying near the lagoon suggested that they were not encouraged to live in that locality. Another record made near Balfour was of a very large flock, estimated to be at least 600, of black-billed gulls (*Larus bulleri*). A few were seen about Collin's Bay and one or two in Collin's Valley. The usual flock was present about Queenstown wharf.

Black-fronted terns (*Chlidonias albigularis*) were with the large flock of gulls near Balfour. Among the birds nearest to the road at least fourteen were counted. One or two pairs haunted Collin's River. On January 20, four were seen in Frankton Arm, and on January 23 a pair at Twelve Mile Creek, near Bob's Cove, on the eastern side of the lake.

We had almost passed the large flock of gulls, when a pied oystercatcher (*Haematopus finschi*) on the edge of the flock caught our atten-

tion. It was then too late to make a special observation to see if others were present. Beside the lagoon near Drift Bay, and not far from where the dead pukeko was seen, were eight pied stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) two of which were young birds. Near Kawarau Falls, black teal (*Aythya novaeseelandiae*) swam and dived in pairs or small parties, one of which consisted of five birds and one of seven. About a dozen grey ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) were in the same locality, some with families of young.

On January 18 a flight of ten paradise ducks (*Tadorna variegata*) was recorded in Collin's Valley. On January 21, calls were heard from the Locky River where small numbers were seen on the water. One flock of seven and another of eight were noted in flight over the river. In the flock of eight were two adult females, but there were no white-headed birds in the flock of seven nor in the flock of ten in Collin's Valley. On three occasions shags were seen in flight over the lake in numbers one, two and five. All appeared to be black shags (*Phalacrocorax carbo*).

On January 23, as we lunched on the shingle flat at the mouth of the Twelve Mile Creek near Bob's Cove, three banded dotterels (*Charadrius bicinctus*) were very agitated by our presence in what was probably their nesting territory. Nests and young were searched for but without success. A few pipits (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*) were noted in Collin's Valley, four being frequently seen on the terrace just above the bunkhouses.

The first of the forest birds to be recorded was the little rifleman (*Acanthisitta chloris*). On the evening of our arrival, a rifleman was among the trees beside the lake, and, during our stay, one serenely entered the occupied bunkrooms and was almost a daily visitor in the office occupied by two men of the party. It made a very businesslike search of all crevices and spider-webs around the doorways and windows. When beech forest was visited in the Collin's Valley, at the Locky River, at Bob's Cove and the Waterworks Reserve, Queenstown, this little wren was seen in numbers from one or two to seven or eight at a time. The largest numbers were seen in the forest at the Locky River.

In forest areas and among low-growing shrubs, the yellow-breasted tit (*Petroica macrocephala macrocephala*) was also present in numbers. The birds seen were principally males, once four being counted close together among low growing shrubs. At Bob's Cove, where over a dozen were counted along a bush track, only one was a female, and though tits were seen daily, only two others were females. Grey warblers (*Pseudogerygone igata*) were also present in fair numbers but were not so frequently noted as the tit and the wren. Fantails (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*) were not much in evidence. All observed, probably not more than half-a-dozen, were of the pied variety. Along the lakeside where flax was freely blooming, silver-eyes (*Zosterops lateralis*) were about in numbers.

The number of bellbirds (*Anthornis melanura*) seen or heard in Collin's Valley was disappointing, but we were told they were plentiful in the more extensive beech forest in the neighbouring Locky Valley. They were also plentiful in the beech forest at Bob's Cove. At the latter place the song of the tui (*Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*) was also repeatedly heard and at least three seen. Those members who visited Queenstown reported seeing one in the Queenstown Domain. It was not recorded by our party either in the Collin's Valley or at the Locky River. Unfortunately, the Locky River was at least five miles from Collin's Bay, and the time and energy taken in the trip to and fro left us able to enter only the edge of the forest that stretched extensively up the Locky Valley and its tributary the Longburn, at the junction of which we had our lunch and gazed with longing eyes on the forest we had not time to explore.

It was in this locality that the calls of a kea (*Nestor notabilis*) were heard, and Mr. Burnett told us he had seen one here the previous week. He reported that, so far, the keas were not attacking his sheep, and only once had there been any suspicion of their having done so.

Kakas (*Nestor meridionalis*), he said, were rare, but two had occasionally been seen in the Locky Valley.

We searched in vain for robins and parrakeets and later were told they were not present. A search also was made for yellowheads (*Mohoua ochrocephala ochrocephala*). At the entrance to the beech forest in Collin's Gorge, one member thought she heard the song of a yellowhead, but, during a wait of about ten minutes, it was not repeated. However, as the party in the gorge returned, some members in the same locality saw three yellow-headed birds in flight among the beeches.

Almost daily two or three pigeons (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) were seen. They were also present at Bob's Cove where one was watched feeding on fuchsia berries which were prolific. It was reported that about a dozen were seen at Halfway Bay (at which place the Locky River enters the lake), feeding on cherries which all disappeared from the trees in a few days. At Bob's Cove the calls of a long-tailed cuckoo (*Eudynamis taitensis*) were heard, and one was seen perched in its characteristic way along a branch.

INTRODUCED BIRDS.

During our stay at Collin's Bay the lower three miles of the Collin's Valley were traversed a number of times, and one could not help being impressed by the small numbers of blackbirds (*Turdus merula*), thrushes (*Turdus ericetorum*) and skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*) which might have been expected to be common in such an apparently favourable locality. Among the trees near our camp beside the lake, the songs of a few thrushes were heard morning and evening, and, at the commencement of our stay, odd songs of the blackbird were heard intermingling with them, but later these were missing. On January 26 a thrush's nest was found in a matagouri just too high to ascertain how many young the nest contained, but low enough to see by one or two upward thrust heads that the nestlings were only a few days old. Just across Lake Wakatipu at Drift Bay were acres of ripe gooseberries which suggested the possibility that towards the end of their nesting activities, there might be a seasonal exodus of thrushes and blackbirds from Collin's Valley to this paradise for fruit-loving birds.

The finch family was well represented, the house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) being only too plentiful in a field of ripening grain. One favoured nesting and roosting place was between the ceiling and roof of one of the bunkrooms as those of us who slept beneath were made well aware. Redpolls (*Carduelis cabaret*) and goldfinches (*carduelis carduelis*) were fairly numerous, a redpoll being found sitting on a nest containing two eggs. Greenfinches (*Chloris chloris*), chaffinches (*Fringilla coelebs*) and yellow-hammers (*Emberiza citrinella*) were noted in small numbers, the nest of a yellowhammer being found near the camp in a matagouri close to where a male sang daily, but in such a position that it defied investigation. A few hedge sparrows (*Prunella modularis*) were observed and an occasional song recorded. In the late afternoon of January 25, a flock of about 100 starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) were seen in a field among sheep, numbers of them being perched on the backs of the animals.

We were told that both quail and pheasant had been liberated in the valley, but that the pheasants had fallen victims to the vermin. Californian quail (*Lophortyx californicus*) were still to be found in the higher areas and some members thought they heard their calls. On January 20 when we visited Kawarau Falls and Drift Bay, on Peninsular Hill above Drift Bay a Californian quail and two young were seen. On the same day a little owl (*Athene noctua*) was perched on a rock on the hillside near the Falls. As we neared the Falls by launch, we passed a tiny islet overgrown with willows. The owner of the launch drew our attention to two eggs on stumps among the willows. These, he told us, were the eggs of a Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*). Six young, he said, had been hatched and taken away by the parents about six weeks previously, and these two addled eggs were all that now remained to be pointed out to interested visitors such as members of the Dunedin Naturalists' Field Club.