

## CROMWELL BIRD DIARY.

By John Middleditch, Dunedin.

April 2, 1948.—Saw a black-billed gull (*Larus bulleri*) chasing a blackbird (*Turdus merula*) for the worms it was carrying. The blackbird dropped the worms and the gull immediately devoured them. (I have seen this happen several times lately.)

Wax-eyes (*Zosterops lateralis*) appeared suddenly in my garden and had a busy time cleaning up insect life on the red hot pokers. The weather has suddenly become cold and it is snowing in the high country. I think these birds come from the slopes of Mt. Pisa, because they always appear when that mountain is experiencing a snowstorm.

May 1.—A harrier (*Circus approximans*) was seen today flying close to the ground and scratching its head with its foot as it floated along, its wings quite motionless. Harriers on the Pisa swamps watch closely the process of duck shooting and on one occasion a hawk followed a wounded duck in a long dive and caught it almost as soon as it reached the ground.

May 7.—Walking through Peniam's Swamp at Lowburn at daylight I encountered a great number of harriers. They seem to have spent the night in the tussocks. When I disturbed them they flew up one by one, uttering a little cry, and hovered overhead quite close to the ground. I counted 45 birds in an area of approximately one acre. The tussock was deep and full of criss-crossing runways made by the pukeko (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) that are very plentiful there. It was possible to get quite close to the birds before being noticed.

May 14.—A bird was brought to me today which was found in the backyard of a local hotel. When liberated in the Clutha River the bird swam away and dived under the water and was not seen again. I think it was a sooty shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*).

August 7.—A pair of pied oystercatchers (*Haematopus finschi*) appeared on the Lowburn Flats.

August 17.—Found a dead kingfisher (*Halcyon sanctus*) at Morven Hills. I have not seen a live one about these parts.

August 26.—Saw a banded dotterel (*Charadrius bicinctus*) on the flats at Cromwell early this morning. It seemed restless and excited and appeared to have just arrived.

August 27.—There are eight black-billed gulls settling down on a patch of shingle in front of the Lowburn dredge. They seem to be likely to nest there, as they employ their familiar "dive-bombing" tactics when anyone approaches them. These birds do not seem afraid of the large dredge that is moving backwards and forwards about three chains away from them, and of the heavy steel cable that is swinging about almost over their heads for 24 hours of every day.

September 9.—There are now 28 black-billed gulls on the gravel bank.

September 17.—There are now 64 gulls on the gravel bank. I have not previously seen so many in this area.

September 27.—Saw a grey duck (*Anas poicilorhyncha*) with nine ducklings in a water-race, well up the side of Mt. Pisa, at least four miles from the river and at this particular time not far from the snow line.

October 1.—I have not seen the banded dotterel since August 26. The gulls reported on September 17 stayed until the north-west winds started a week ago. They had then increased to 150 birds and showed signs of nesting but have now moved to some other place, leaving what seemed to be the original birds.