

BLUE-WATTLED CROW COLONY.

By R. McKenzie, Thames.

On March 20, in company with Mr. H. Morgan, of Paeroa, I spent a day in some large areas of native bush in the Colville Range between Waitekauri and Paeroa. Mr. Morgan had told me in the course of a conversation some time previously that one day two years ago when he was working in that area he had seen some large birds hopping about vigorously in trees near the track. These birds, he and his brothers in their young days, knew as crows. He had never heard them utter any calls or song and knew them as silent birds.

I had been pursuing various trails for 15 months past in my search for the blue-wattled crow (*Callaeas cinerea wilsoni*) which is regarded as a rare bird, and as Mr. Morgan might be the man to lead me to success, our journey of March 20 was arranged.

I left Thames at 6.50 a.m. and on reaching Paeroa at about 7.30 found Mr. Morgan ready. Off we went to Waitekauri where we left the car and started on foot up a track. After climbing gradually and investigating and listening at intervals, we came to a clearing of some acres on the top of the range at about 1800 feet above sea level. It was 11.45 a.m., so we decided to lunch, and while Mr. Morgan went to get water for tea I wandered down to the edge of the bush and sat down to listen and watch.

I could distinguish many familiar bird calls, but presently I heard some which were quite new to me. Actually, I was expecting a song like that of the tui or bell-bird, but what I heard was quite different or sounded something like the chatter of a whitehead mingled with calls which sounded like "kio-kio," not very musical but reminiscent of some notes of the kaka. Presently the unfamiliar notes ceased, so I went back to the place where we had decided to lunch. After lunch it was agreed to investigate a patch of bush near a large rimu, where I had heard the strange notes. We were not more than a hundred yards into the bush, travelling with care, when Mr. Morgan drew my attention to a large tawa tree fifteen yards away. Its base was below us so that we were nearly level with branches some 20 feet up, and there presenting a side view was a beautiful big blue-wattled crow, with its typical outline, eyeing us curiously. We froze and gazed for perhaps 30 seconds, when it bounded away to another branch, and went on feeding, I think on the tawa berries which were ripe and luscious, and it continually tore off twigs with leaves attached. These were constantly being dropped. It went on feeding and moving about with great rapidity, bounding from six to ten feet, sometimes using its wings, and finally, when we moved to get a better view, it flew away rapidly and with apparent ease.

We separated slightly and moved on in the direction in which the bird had flown. Within 50 yards I saw another bird, so settled down under cover to watch and listen. Presently, after a quiet spell of about ten minutes, I heard directly above me the mysterious call "kio-kio" which was answered from another tree close by, and within a few minutes there were at least 12 birds within say, two chains, all calling "kio-kio," and various other calls which I cannot repeat. Then they started to sing and now I heard the famous song that I had so often read about. So far as I can remember there was no real similarity to the song of the tui or the bellbird. It was more broken, some of it melodious, inter-mixed with calls which seemed to consist of expressions of satisfaction and sheer joy—maybe for the warm sunshine, maybe for the abundance of ripe berries. Most of this time I could see only one bird, which was sunning itself, although there were at least a dozen around me moving about noisily with much flapping of wings on leaves, feeding and calling out. Of these, only fitful glimpses were obtained. It was noticeable that whilst hopping around and feeding in a tree they continually gained height so that when they moved to another tree they flew with a gliding motion, slowly losing height.

After perhaps half an hour several obviously younger birds flew into a tree within ten yards of me, and in full view they commenced feeding, moving rapidly with long hops and fluttering of wings, sometimes breaking off bunches of berries and holding the twig in one claw whilst feeding on the berries. These birds were only about half the size of the one first seen, and were much darker in colour. I would describe their colour as a dull dark brown—darker than a female blackbird. They all appeared very lively and flew without obvious effort. Their flight was not noisy like that of the pigeon and tui—there was no buzzing sound that these birds make, but whilst feeding and using their wings to help their long hops they frequently hit leaves and twigs with the wings, causing quite a stir in the trees. In all, I saw ten or twelve birds, about half of which were adult, and Mr. Morgan, from a position about 40 yards away, saw five or six more. He did not see any young ones.

The young ones I saw were all on one tree, feeding on small berries that I did not succeed in identifying, but they might have been horoeke (*Pseudopanax crassifolium*) or tarata (*Pittosporum eugenoides*) which were plentiful in the area. When we made any noise the birds became invisible and remained motionless, but when we took cover and remained still they soon started to call and move about.

On one occasion I noticed that two birds in separate trees sang on two occasions about five notes in unison. Several times the deep organ notes were uttered, but only a few of the birds appeared to be in full song. All of them were vocal, however, and they seemed to be having a wonderful time. We stayed under them for two hours when we had reluctantly to leave for home. As soon as we moved and commenced to talk the birds remained silent, and we saw and heard them no more.

FURTHER GREY TEAL NESTS.

By J. M. Cunningham, Masterton.

Until the nesting of the grey teal (*Anas gibberifrons*) becomes more familiar than at present, it seems desirable to give full details of all records. On October 2nd, 1948, I found a nest, the third of this species I have had the good fortune to see. The first nest recorded in New Zealand was described by Mr. R. H. D. Stidolph (Emu, 45, April, 1945), and I described another containing a freak double-yolked egg in New Zealand Bird Notes for January, 1949 (Vol. 3, No. 4). The present nest was found within a few yards of the nest described by Stidolph at Carter's Bush, near Masterton, and resembled it almost exactly. The top was formed of dry grass, about 18 inches above shallow water, on a ridge between two niggerhead (*Carex*) clumps, though it was not so heavily screened. While I was examining the nest, I heard a sort of moaning sound from a duck which was swimming a few yards away. Before it swam under cover I was able to see that it was neither a grey nor mallard. I have not previously heard any species of duck make this sound, which gives the expression "like a dying duck" some reality. A few minutes later I heard the sound again, this time in the air, and a grey teal flew over and circled me several times. I have little doubt that it was the owner of the nest.

The nest contained six eggs, of which only two looked in any way typical. One was obviously larger, and being greenish in colour, was undoubtedly either a grey duck or mallard egg. The next two in size were the buff brown of the teal, rounded almost equally at both ends, and the other three seemed ridiculously small, and were quite pointed at the narrower end. Collectively, the clutch looked ludicrous. There was no down on the nest, which appeared to be fresh, and it did not appear as if the teal had laid in what was a deserted grey duck nest. It was kept under observation for some time but the eggs were not incubated. I believe it probable that it was deserted after the laying in it by a duck of another species. The egg measurements were (in