

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.

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## 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

millimetres): 58.2 x 43.9 (? grey duck); 53.2 x 40.9; 54.6 x 40.6; 49.6 x 33.3; 48.9 x 33.3; 48.9 x 32.9.

On October 3 another nest was found nearby. This nest was not screened in any way, being on top of a niggerhead with barely any shelter above, and was for a moment thought to be a pukeko's (*Porphyrio melanotus*) so similar was it. This nest had apparently been used successfully, though there were two eggs left, one being addled and the other containing a dead chick. Again, both ends were rounded almost similarly, and the sizes were 49.8 x 36.5 and 49.3 x 36.4. The late Edgar Stead informed me that these two were rather smaller than examples from Australia in his collection, though Oliver ("New Zealand Birds," 1930) gives 46 x 34 and 45 x 33 as typical. However, there seems to be an extraordinary amount of variation in the sizes of these eggs in New Zealand, and it is odd that of the four recorded nests, two should contain eggs which were obviously freaks.

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## THE ELUSIVE FERN BIRD.

By S. D. Potter, Auckland.

Although not by any means rare in many suitable areas and comparatively tame, the fernbird (*Bowdleria punctata*) is decidedly elusive when it comes to efforts to ascertain its habits. This is, of course, due to the fact that it seldom flies and inhabits swampy areas.

At one time I heard calls repeated several times from a large but solitary tea-tree bush. Moving to a point only a few yards from it I watched for several minutes and although some movement was visible from time to time I never actually saw the bird. I then decided on another method and tossed several lumps of earth into the bush, and although the bird protested once or twice it still remained hidden. The only thing left to do was to examine the bush branch by branch, and even then I very nearly lost, for the bird remained stationary on a twig not two feet from my face.

On another expedition Mr. C. A. Fleming and I were determined to find a nest even if it took us the whole day. By carefully searching several small areas of swamp not so very far from Auckland, a pair of fernbirds was finally traced to a certain area of some ten square yards. In this area the rushes were thick and in places were partly flattened. By patient watching the field was again reduced to some five square yards and we took a line on the area where the nest seemed certain to be placed. However, although both birds at different times alighted within a few yards of us they worked so cleverly and silently through the reeds that we were still uncertain of the exact location of the nest, so rather than run the risk of destroying it we retreated a few yards and again waited.

In due course the adults returned with food (insects) and worked silently through the reeds. Usually the only trace of their progress was the occasional quiver of a reed. Presently came the faint whispering of young and it was by that that the nest was found.

It was remarkably well concealed in a dense tangle of reeds screened by others which were semi-prostrate and was about one foot above the water level. It was made entirely of reeds without any lining whatever and contained three dark-skinned youngsters three or four days old and an infertile egg.

We took several photographs and while standing not more than four feet from the nest both adults came a number of times and immediately three yellow gapes would open. On each occasion the adult brought a small moth and usually picked up a piece of excreta and flew away, dropping it while in flight. It is a revelation to find that the fernbird which seems so shy is in reality very tame. These birds ignored both of us and the disturbed surroundings.