

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.

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.

The flight is very limited and I doubt if 20 yards is often exceeded in one effort. The wings work rapidly but the pace is slow and has a "tail-heavy" appearance. The call is "tick! tick!" in a somewhat metallic note and occasionally "u-tick!" At times the male utters a loud bell-like note of "toick!" which his mate answers immediately with "tick!" Seen side by side, the male may be distinguished by the larger amount of russet in his plumage.

BIRDS WEST OF THE WAIU RIVER

By J. V. Dunckley, Dunedin Naturalists' Field Club,
and C. M. Todd, Dunedin.

In November and December, 1947, and January, 1948, notes were recorded of birds seen west of the Waiau River, Southland. The birds listed at Lake Hauroko (at the south end) represent a complete avifaunal list for that locality on December 17, 1947.

Shag (believed to be the spotted *Stictocarbo punctatus punctatus*, a small species, grey with whitish front).—A small colony at Sandhill Point, Dec. 8; another colony reported at the mouth of the Waiaurahi River. Two shags (probably a different species), Lake Hauroko, Dec. 17.

Paradise Duck (*Tadorna variegata*).—Pair with young, Sandhill Point, Dec. 6; single bird near mouth of the Hutburn, Dec. 8; several pairs of birds, four with young, Lillburn Valley, Jan. 10 to Feb. 12.

Grey Duck (*Anas poicilorhyncha*).—Six south end of Lake Hauroko; one feeding in Waiaurahi River about six miles south of Lake Hauroko, Dec. 19; one feeding at the mouth of the Hutburn, Nov. 14.

Grey Teal (*Anas gibberifrons*).—Four, Lake Hauroko.

Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*).—Two with cygnets on Lake Hauroko.

Harrier (*Circus approximans*).—One, Hump Ridge, Dec. 17.

South Island Pied Oystercatcher (*Haematopus finschi*).—Common on beach Te Waewae Bay between Waiau mouth and mouth of the Waikoau.

Black Oystercatcher (*Haematopus unicolor*).—Several at Sandhill Point, Dec. 6.

White-fronted Tern (*Sterna striata*).—Sandhill Point, Dec. 6.

Black-backed Gull (*Larus dominicanus*).—Several were observed at Sandhill Point on Dec. 6, and occasionally at the mouth of the Waikoau River.

Wood Pigeon (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*).—Fairly common throughout the whole of the west Waiau area, but seemed to prefer bush with a sheltered aspect.

Kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*).—Common throughout area west of Blue Cliffs. Particularly common around Port Craig, where they were observed flying in flocks (one of twenty-nine) in the early mornings and evenings. Numbers here were probably due to plentiful food in rotten logs in cut-over area. Rimus frequently seen with loose bark stripped off them. Abundant in Waiaurahi Valley, around Lake Hauroko and on the lower eastern slopes of the Billows, west side of the Lillburn Valley.

Kea (*Nestor notabilis*).—Two, Hump Ridge, Nov. 17; five, one lame, Hump Ridge, Dec. 14.

Parrakeet (*Cyanorhampus novaeseelandiae* (?)).—Lake Hauroko, two. One, track halfway between the edge of bush and lake.

Shining Cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*).—None seen, but heard, Port Craig area, Nov. 29 and Dec. 8; Francisburn, Nov. 30; Bluecliffs, Dec. 22 to Jan. 10.

Long-tailed Cuckoo (*Eudynamis taitensis*).—One, Bluecliffs, Jan. 1; one chased by a bellbird near the mouth of the Humpburn, Jan. 3.