

LONG-TAILED CUCKOO VICTIMISING SILVER-EYE.

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Surprisingly little of a concrete nature has been recorded of the breeding habits in New Zealand of the long-tailed cuckoo (*Eudynamis taitensis*); some of the statements that have been published are couched in loose and general terms and lack corroboration, so much so that they have to be rejected. There is good evidence, however, that the usual foster parent of this cuckoo in the North Island is the whitehead (*Mohoua albicilla*) and in the South Island the brown creeper (*Finschia novaeseelandiae*). One thing is certain, the grey warbler (*Pseudogerygone igata*) is not the foster parent of this species of cuckoo, but of the shining cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*).

Following on the discovery by J. M. Cunningham of a long-tailed cuckoo's egg in the deserted nest of a silver-eye (*Zosterops lateralis*) in the Tararua foothills on January 5, 1946, at Kiriwhakapapa, in company with my wife I visited the area on January 20, when a silver-eye's nest was found by my wife in an introduced redwood which had been planted in the forest area, milled some years previously, by the State Forest Service. The nest was on a branch about nine feet above the ground, right alongside a track that marks the route of a former tramline. The nest had a distinct bulge or pimple in the bottom and contained a large chick, with the eyes just opening, of a long-tailed cuckoo. The chick had a yellow gape, dark feathers were appearing on the back and yellowish ones on the sides of the underparts. It clung tenaciously to the bottom of the nest and it was quite a task to get it out. The adult silver-eyes were in attendance and the alarm note was uttered.

It was quite obvious to me at this stage that the chick, before many days passed, would drop through the bottom of the nest, the structure of which was quite unequal to the strain imposed on it by accommodating such an oversize chick. I refrained from interfering in any way with the nest to see if my supposition was correct and revisited it seven days later. Sure enough, there was the nest with the bottom out of it and there was no sign of the chick. It could not possibly have reached maturity in the interim.

I cannot imagine any circumstances in which a silver-eye's nest could hold a long-tailed cuckoo chick until it reached the flying stage. As is well-known, the nest of the silver-eye is a cradle-like structure, usually suspended from the rim of the cup between two branchlets. In other words, if the long-tailed cuckoo persistently and exclusively selected the nest of the silver-eye for its egg, there could hardly be any other result than the extinction of the cuckoo. On February 27, 1949, when again visiting the area, my wife found an old nest of a silver-eye, quite close to the one described above, 6½ feet up, in a juvenile kaikomako. This nest was filled with leaves but when these were removed there was another long-tailed cuckoo's egg, measuring 23.7 by 18 m.m.; judging from its appearance it could well have been laid in the 1946 season.

Thus we have three recorded instances, all apparently in one season, in which the nests of the silver-eye were used by this cuckoo; no doubt there would be others. The silver-eye during this season was quite numerous in the area; the whitehead somewhat scarce. There is some reason to suspect that the selection of the silver-eye's nest might have been that of a particular individual long-tailed cuckoo and that it was not the practice of all cuckoos in the area; the three nests concerned were within a few chains of each other. It is the accepted view that each hen (of the European cuckoo) shows a decided preference to a particular fosterer—in this case a pseudo-fosterer—and limits her operations to a restricted area. That view fits the facts of the present case.