

VISIT TO A SHAGGERY.

By R. H. Michie, Kaitaia.

On September 27th, 1948, I made a three days' trip to the far North visiting the area between Scott's Point, Cape Maria, and Te Paki stream and the outlet of Te Werahi Stream. On October 24th I made another three days' trip, visiting Pandora, Scott's Point, and revisiting small lakes which I had visited on the previous trip, together with other interesting nooks and corners.

The little blue penguin (*Eudyptula minor*) was nesting in burrows in rushes on slopes above Twilight Bay; one pair only of oystercatchers (*Haematopus* sp.) was seen here (one black and one pied). At Cape Maria four pairs of banded dotterels (*Charadrius bicinctus*) were racing around as though they were nesting.

I stumbled right on to a shag colony on September 25th. The colony consisted of large pied (*Phalacrocorax varius*), small pied and white-throated shags (*P. melanoleucos*). There were 23 nests in all stages of construction, two containing three eggs in each, and one nest containing one egg. On October 23 I revisited this colony to find that its numbers had about doubled: there now being 38 nests, 21 containing eggs, one containing three chicks apparently just hatched, and one nest with one chick and two eggs. All three shags mentioned were occupying nests. There were three small black shags present also; they had their heads under their wings having a doze.

The colony is situated in a beautifully sheltered corner of the lake at the western end against a patch of high manuka. The outlet of the lake is apparently gradually building up as the lake level is rising, killing the manuka. It is in these dead manuka trees that the shags have taken up their abode. They presented a beautiful spectacle in the afternoon sun, with the water as calm as glass. In the colony were two small pied shags with much more white on them than usual, having white along the top front portion of the wings and white on the back of the neck down to the shoulders. One had a black spot at the back of the head.

We visited the locality of the largest colony on the Ninety-Mile Beach of the black-backed gulls (*Larus dominicanus*). I had not expected to find many there, as since the toheroas have completely disappeared from the beach and the tua tuas are not much in evidence either, the gulls have almost deserted the beach where they used to be literally in thousands. However, I was pleased to find about 100 of them there getting things in order; they had nests about ready to lay in; we found about 30 in all stages of construction.

Along one 18-mile stretch of beach between Scott's Point and the Bluff we passed nine pairs of oystercatchers. In nearly every case one was black and one pied. Three pied in flight passed us going up the beach.

On December 19, 1948, accompanied by Mr. F. Brent, of Kaitaia, we travelled on horseback and made a further search for shag colonies (in particular the small black shag) in the lakes and lagoons in the vicinity of Te Kao. We visited approximately a dozen lakes and lagoons but were not successful in locating any new shag colony. We did, however, make a very interesting find in discovering a tiny lake (or lagoon) containing three dabchicks (*Poliiocephalus rufopectus*). I have searched in vain for these little birds for several years on every lake, etc., that I could find, and had about given up hope of ever finding them in these parts. I think the last one recorded was by Mr. Watts, of Paua (Parengarenga) about 10 years ago. It had been shot on one of the lakes on the Te Paki station.

On December 29 I visited a tiny colony of red-billed gulls (*Larus novaehollandiae*) at Scott's Point. There were only about a dozen nests in the colony, some containing fresh eggs, others with freshly-hatched chicks and others with chicks almost half grown. The birds in this colony had nests in various stages of completion on October 24.