

## COMMUNAL DISPLAY OF THE SHINING CUCKOO.

By J. S. Watson and P. C. Bull, Wellington.

On December 13, 1949, the writers were in camp at Gwavas State Forest, Hawke's Bay. At 6.30 a.m. a number of shining cuckoos (*Chalcites lucidus*) were heard calling in the trees by the camp. The note was the descending "piu-piu" which terminates the usual song of this species. Five birds were present and for a few minutes they were all in view on the branches of a dead tree, but for most of the time they were in the tops of thick pines where it was difficult to see exactly what was happening. The birds when calling sat in a very erect posture flicking their wings. Individual birds several times flew out of the trees and caught passing insects; the increase of noise on their return to the tree suggested that the insect was being fed to another bird, though this was not actually seen. All the birds appeared to be adults. The impression received at the time was that some form of communal display with courtship feeding was taking place. The birds remained within hearing of the camp for about one hour after which one bird, usually to be heard about the camp, started singing.

A rather similar display was observed by one of us (P.C.B.) at the edge of the bush in the Upper Waihaha Valley, western shore of Lake Taupo on January 7, 1950. On this occasion the display lasted only five minutes and occurred at 1.15 p.m. One bird was calling in the usual way when another flew into the tree and the trilling notes ("piu-piu") were then heard. Two or three other shining cuckoos arrived within the next few minutes and all the birds flew about in the top of a rather bushy tree in an excited manner. After five minutes the trilling stopped and the birds separated. A few minutes later a single bird was giving the usual song from this tree and a second one was doing the same from another tree several hundred yards away.

Graham (Forest and Bird, 55, 5, 1940) records witnessing a very similar scene which he interpreted as an adult feeding young birds. There must be considerable doubt, however, whether this is the correct interpretation of what he saw. The date on which the incident occurred "one day in November" is exceptionally early for young cuckoos to be about; Dr. Falla informs us that January is the usual date for the appearance of young cuckoos in the Wellington district. It would seem more probable that the incident recorded by Graham was in fact courtship feeding. The Summarised Classified Notes for 1943 (N.Z. Bird Notes, 1:26) also records an instance of courtship feeding. A short account of alleged feeding of a young bird by an adult of this species appeared in Summarised Classified Notes for 1944 (N.Z. Bird Notes, 1:77) but from the few details given the possibility of courtship feeding cannot be excluded.

This habit of courtship feeding has been recorded in two of the three African species of *Chrysococcyx*, a genus very closely related to *Chalcites* (Friedmann, H., 1948, "The Parasitic Cuckoos of Africa," Washington, U.S.A.). It is true that adult males of the African species have been recorded feeding young birds, and Moreau (1949, Ibis, 91:536) states "While it is possible that in one or two cases the bird receiving food may in fact have been an adult female, it is certain that most of the reports of young being fed can be accepted as authentic." Thus, while it may eventually be found that this habit does occur in the New Zealand shining cuckoo, we do not agree with Friedmann (1949, Ibis, 91:517) that it has as yet been proved.

**BREEDING OF BLACK-BILLED GULL.**—A colony of black-billed gulls (*Larus bulleri*) nested on the riverbed and bank of the Oreti River, Southland (on Mr. J. Price's property) last season. I counted 250 nests—there could be 300—all with two or three eggs and the birds were sitting on November 3 when I visited it. Old residents of the district say that this is the first time the birds have nested there during the last 50 years.—Mrs. Olga Sansom, Invercargill.