

## HABITS OF WHITE HERON.

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The following observations were made in the White Heron Sanctuary Roto Creek, Okarito, on December 10, 1948:—

I found the herons (*Casmerodius albus*) nesting in a large sprawling kowhai tree overhanging the black, swamp-fed Roto Creek.

Associated with the herons and nesting side by side with them were many white-throated shags (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*). Nests of both herons and shags seemed similar except in regard to size, the heron having the larger nest. In appearance, the nests were very rough, being composed of a round-shaped platform of interwoven twigs. The friendship between white heron and shag seems accounted for because the heron with its fearsome bill, affords protection for the shag, whereas the shag helps in providing food for the heron.

Nineteen white herons were seen on or near the kowhai tree, five of them were young still within the nest. Shags were in far greater numbers, there being between forty and fifty birds in the vicinity. The small number of heron nestlings was due to the fact that the breeding season was well advanced and some of the young birds had left the nests. An average of about twelve birds are produced each year. The young are covered with a yellowish white down, with a tuft of fine white feathers from the base of the beak to the top of the head. By six weeks of age the birds have their feathered plumage and are ready to fly. It takes, however, three years for the young heron to reach full adulthood, mate and start its own nest building. The birds seemed quite friendly—more so than the shags, and could be approached without undue alarm being created.

In August, 1947, towards the mouth of the Big Wanganui River, South Westland, I saw a white heron catching and devouring silver eyes (*Zosterops lateralis*). The silver eyes were feeding on insects in the low bushes along the riverbank—the heron stood like a statue in the shade of one of the bushes until the birds gradually approached to within two or three feet of the heron. Immediately the heron began to sway its neck backwards and forwards, at the same time moving forward. Suddenly there was a flash and the heron would have the silver eye. He next proceeded to swallow it head first, feathers and all, in several large gulps. The whole action occurred in a very short time. The silver eye seemed mesmerised for an instant by the swaying movement of the heron's neck.

Three times this took place that afternoon. Often the heron would be unsuccessful and would get in what appeared to be a great rage over missing his prey.

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RINGING SCHEME.—Rings for use by members have now been received; the scheme may be said to have been officially commenced with the ringing of the first bird on February 27, 1950. It is not intended that all birds shall be ringed at random, and the society is at present authorised to ring the following protected birds: Caspian tern, white-fronted tern, black-billed gull, red-billed gull, gannet and stilt. It is emphasised that it is an offence to handle protected birds for any purpose without permission, and practically all native and some introduced birds are protected. Members are referred to "New Zealand Bird Notes," October, 1949, for details of the scheme, and those wishing to ring may apply to a member of the ringing committee, giving their plans in broad outline as described. The ringing committee consists of Mr. J. M. Cunningham, Dr. E. A. Falla, Mr. H. R. McKenzie (who has recently been appointed to take Mr. R. B. Sibson's place) and Dr. K. A. Wodzicki.—J. M. Cunningham, convener, March 1, 1950.