

## VISIT TO LITTLE BARRIER IN NOVEMBER, 1948.

By H. R. McKenzie, Clevedon.

This visit was made at the time of year which had been covered by previous very full accounts. I am, therefore, condensing this report by dealing with the birds in groups instead of individually. The visiting party consisted of my wife, Mr. W. P. Mead, of Castlecliff, Wanganui, and myself. A great deal of help was readily given by Mr. and Mrs. Parkin, of the Island, and Mrs. B. Hall and Mr. J. Jessup, visiting botanists. Mr. Mead's chief object was the photographing of the stitchbird. He made the most persistent efforts but gained almost negligible results. This was due to the great number of tuis. It had been expected that the stitchbirds would be feeding on the flax (*Phormium tenax*). However, the tuis kept the numerous bellbirds almost entirely clear of the flax blooms and the stitchbirds had to stay in the bush altogether. A memorable feature of the visit was a trip round the Island by boat and outboard motor, conducted by Mr. Parkin, with Mr. Mead and myself. The scenery was so grand and of such rugged type that one marvelled at the hardihood of the men who have traversed its sharp ridges, high steep cliffs and deep ravines. It certainly looks a safe place for the birds.

### CROSSING FROM LEIGH ON 16/11/48.

Several hundreds each of fluttering shearwater, flesh-footed shearwater and Cook's petrels were observed, the latter being mostly nearer the Island as seems usual. Over a hundred of the busy little diving petrel were scattered over the last six miles. Less in numbers were the giant petrel, 12 or so, white-faced storm petrel, 6 or more, some gannet, black-backed gulls and two white-fronted tern.

### RETURN FROM LITTLE BARRIER ON 28/11/48.

Fluttering and flesh-footed shearwater were again each in hundreds. The diving petrel were scattered right across, over 200 in number. There were several gannets and black-backed gulls, one white-faced storm petrel halfway across and one young Arctic skua, light phase, chasing terns near Leigh.

### NATIVE BIRDS ON THE ISLAND.

These were thriving and it was considered that tuis, stitchbirds and rifleman had increased. Tuis were frequently seen fluttering on the outside of wind-pressed growth to disturb moths. This may indicate pressure on the food supply owing to numbers. Bellbirds and whiteheads were as numerous as before, while kaka, pigeon and red-fronted parakeet were in good numbers. Less numerous but in good proportion according to territorial habit, were pied tit, fantail, grey warbler, long-tailed cuckoo, kingfisher, North Island robin, morepork, harrier, and large pied shag. The kiwi is hard to estimate in numbers but is certainly doing very well. The more scarce birds were shining cuckoo, of which few were heard in proportion to the apparently suitable area, and the silver eye, of which one only was seen once, singing strongly on a tree in the orchard. From the shores of the island were seen Buller's shearwater, a few far out, red-billed gulls in small parties, Cook's petrel, fluttering shearwater and gannets. Little blue penguins came ashore in great numbers at night and Cook's petrel flew up to the heights from dusk onwards. Some black petrel remains were found on the high country and a single sooty shearwater carcass had been found fresh by Mr. Parkin on the shore in August, 1948, and kept until we arrived.

### INTRODUCED BIRDS.

House sparrow, thrush, blackbird, starling and hedge-sparrow had noticeably increased. The less plentiful were skylark, up to eight seen, and chaffinch, about 10 pairs. Single birds of a species were greenfinch, one on a dead tree calling "Che-e-e-se", and a redpoll, a female in breed-

ing plumage, feeding and calling. I believe that this is the first redpoll record for the island.

#### BREEDING.

Breeding was much in evidence though no special effort was made to find nests. Young flying bellbirds were seen everywhere, but only one young tui and one brood of whiteheads were found out of the nest. Most of the rifleman seen were flying young. The chaffinches, hedge-sparrows, thrushes, blackbirds and house-sparrows all had eggs and young in nests. The blue penguin chicks ranged from small to nearly half-grown. A small colony of about 20 nests of white-fronted tern was observed from the boat at Lion Rock, along the coast to the west. The birds were sitting. On the trip round the Island two or three black-backed gulls were seen on nests. The total seen on this trip was 14, all adults. A morepork, found earlier, was sitting on two eggs and hatched them while we were there. One of the best thrills of the visit was the finding of a whitehead's nest with three beautiful rose-pink eggs. These hatched before we left. Other birds were, of course, breeding, but the nests or young were not seen. The pet red-fronted parakeet "Sammy," was suspected of having a nest but she could not be successfully followed to it. After the loss of her three chicks last year it was hoped that she would have better luck this time. The rearing of "Sammy" from a naked chick with a broken leg is typical of the devotion shown by Mr. and Mrs. Parkin to the birds of Little Barrier Island.

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BIRDS ON STEWART ISLAND.—In January, 1949, Mr. W. Martin, of the Dunedin Naturalists' Field Club, visited the southern area of Stewart Island, and the following bird report is compiled from notes received from him: Native pigeons (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) were very common near the freezer at Port Pegasus, where they were feeding on the konini berries. A flock of 60 was noted at Halfmoon Bay flying overhead late in the evening of January 28. Kakas (*Nestor meridionalis*) were not numerous but were seen occasionally at Pegasus Bay and on the Tin Range. Parrakeets (*Cyanoramphus* spp.) were much more often heard than seen. Tuís (*Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*) and bellbirds (*Anthornis melanura*) were very numerous. Kiwis (*Apteryx australis*) were seen by several members of the party on the Tin Ridge, and their holes were numerous in muddy areas to the north of Pegasus. One solitary weka (*Gallirallus australis* ?) was noted on an island in Port Pegasus and none on the mainland. Other land birds were few. It is possible that the orange wattled crow (*Calleas cinerea cinerea*) is still present, but it is two or three years since one was recorded. Of the petrels present the mutton bird (*Puffinus griseus*) was the one most commonly noted. Vandalism is rife at Pegasus. Fully one-third of the bush area and scrub at Pegasus has been burnt off at one time or another, the explanation given being that it was easier to get at the deer. The human menace far exceeds the deer menace in this area.

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LARGE PIED SHAGS VICTIMISED BY HARRIER, Little Barrier Island.—Towards the shag nesting colony on August 1, 1944, I saw a number of pied shags (*Phalacrocorax varius*) wheeling in circles and screaming, with a harrier (*Circus approximans*) attacking and apparently shepherding them. It alighted on the ground so I went to investigate. The harrier left but I found five newly broken egg shells on the ground within a few feet. A sixth egg was in a grassy crevice and was intact. Since then I have on several occasions found broken egg shells, minus contents, on the ground, the last occasion being on 17/8/47, when ten broken eggs were counted at the mouth of Tirikakawa Stream. They were lying within a radius of six feet, all with the contents missing. I consider that a harrier must have been responsible in each case.—C. H. Parkin, Little Barrier Island.