

WINTER NESTING, 1949.

By H. R. McKenzie, Clevedon.

The number of nests found this winter (1949) is unusually large and I doubt if so many have been known to occur in one year at this season. All of the nests mentioned were found without any search being made so that they must represent only a small proportion of the total about this part of the country.

I submit the following carefully authenticated reports:—

THRUSH (*Turdus ericetorum*).

Mr. D. E. Alexander, Otau, Clevedon:—

5/6/49.—Nest; five eggs.

7/6/49.—Four eggs hatched; one addled.

1/7/49.—Chicks all left the nest when looked at. They returned that night to the nest.

2/7/49.—Left nest finally.

4/7/49.—Some chicks seen. None seen after this date. Cold wet weather could have killed them, or they may have crossed to the other side of the river. The first egg must have been laid on approximately 19/5/49.

Mr. M. F. Henry, Headmaster, Milson School, Palmerston North.

16/6/49.—Nest in tree on school boundary; three eggs.

17/6/49.—Four eggs. Later, accidentally dislodged by some boys before hatching.

Mr. L. P. Sladdin, Clevedon.

18/6/49.—Nest; four eggs; later water-logged and deserted.

Mr. H. R. McKenzie, Clevedon.

25/6/49.—Nest, four eggs, in tree in garden.

2/7/49.—First chick hatching.

9/7/49.—Nest empty. Chicks probably taken by a morepork (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*) which was about the garden.

Mr. M. J. Thorn, Clevedon.

29/6/49.—Bird on nest 18 feet up in a *Cupressus macrocarpa*; inaccessible.

11/7/49.—Feeding young.

18/7/49.—Two dead chicks on ground, 22 and 26 feet from point directly below nest. The feathers were breaking through at the ends of the large quills so the chicks would be about six days old when killed.

A pair of minahs (*Acrodothis tristis*) living at the spot suspected of taking out the chicks and dropping them. This habit of the minah is described in "Mike the Minah," Mrs. Louisa Clark Williams and Francis X. Williams, Honolulu. Paul Porter, "The Elepaio," Vol. 8, No. 1, July, 1947, describes the visiting of sparrows' nests by minahs in Honolulu and the subsequent finding of two fledgling sparrows on the ground.

Masters L. Grey and K. Fawcett, Clevedon.

2/7/49.—Nest; four eggs; destroyed.

Bull, "Notes on the Breeding Cycle of the Thrush and Blackbird in New Zealand," The Emu, Vol. 46, Nov., 1946, gives his earliest nests as 1/7/34, 3 and 4 eggs. McKenzie, N.Z. Bird Notes, Vol. 2, No. 3, January, 1947, records a nest on 20/7/46 with four chicks three or four days old. Wilkinson (Mrs. A. S.), and Stidolph, N.Z. Bird Notes, Vol. 1, No. 7, Dec., 1944, record a first egg laid on 29/7/44. Stidolph in the same issue records two nests, also on 29/7/44, of two and three eggs, the first laying dates of which would be approximately July 28th and 27th respectively.

In the case described by Mr. D. E. Alexander it will be noted that the chicks left the nest 24 days after hatching. This is much longer than the usual period of 13 to 15 days. From my own observations of the nest on 25/6/49 at my home the parent, owing to the cold wet weather at this season, has to brood the chicks almost constantly so

that they must receive less food and therefore develop more slowly. Another very interesting point in Mr. Alexander's account is the return of the chicks to the nest for the night of 1/7/49. I have not previously known this to happen. The report of Mr. M. F. Henry is remarkable in that the locality is so far to the south for pre-season laying.

BLACKBIRD (*Turdus merula*).

Masters L. Grey and K. Fawcett, Clevedon.

2/7/49.—Nest, three chicks about five days old. Destroyed. The date of laying of the first egg would be approximately 13/6/49.

P. H. Crum, Clevedon.

1/8/49—Nest; two eggs; destroyed in cutting hedge.

H. R. McKenzie, Clevedon.

23/7/49.—Nest begun in home garden. Building carried on spasmodically until 5/8/49.

5/8/49—First egg.

6/8/49—Second egg.

7/8/49—Bird not on nest. Perhaps deserted.

8/8/49—Eggs sucked, as if by rat.

Other early unpublished records:

2/8/44—Pair building. 26/8/44—Two eggs in nest.

10/9/46—Two chicks in nest in home garden about eight days old.

15/9/46—Two young flying at Ardmore.

The blackbird usually nests later than the thrush. Bull, 1946, gives the first date of egg-laying as August 27, and states that he has had no winter laying. Mrs. I. Tily, N.Z. Bird Notes, Vol 3, No. 4, January, 1949, p. 106, gives the date of a first egg as 28/8/47, very early for Dunedin. McKenzie, in the same issue, writes, "26/7/47—A new unfinished nest, apparently deserted; 3/9/47, two tiny chicks, long dead, in the now finished nest."

Bull, 1946, found with the thrush an appreciable gap between the winter laying and the orthodox spring laying. This is borne out in the present observations which also indicate a similar gap in regard to the blackbird.

SUMMARY OF EARLIEST DATES.

Thrush.—First egg laid approximately 19/5/49 (five eggs found on 5/6/49, four of which hatched on 7/6/49). Four other nests with eggs laid in June.

Blackbird.—First egg laid approximately 13/6/49 (three chicks about five days old found on 2/7/49). Two further nests with first eggs laid on 1/8/49 and 5/8/49. This is apparently earlier than other published records, even though much later than the one mentioned above.

HIGH NESTING OF PIED TIT (*Petroica toitoi*) AND OTHER NOTES.—On 27/10/49 two bushmen felled a large rimu and on examining the trunk and head to crosscut it, they found a pied tit's nest in a small hole in a branch, containing three young birds ready to fly. They took the little birds out of the nest and set them on a tree-stump a short distance away. The two parent birds who had been watching them handle the little ones started feeding them right away. The nest was over sixty feet from the ground, and how they survived is a mystery. On 26/10/49 my mate and I felled a large totara and in falling it knocked a nest of the grey warbler (*Pseudogerygone igata*) to pieces; but the two eggs were so well bedded in the feather lining that they did not break. The nest was lined with feathers of pigeon, tui and parrakeet. Recently three matsis have been felled containing nests of the starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). Hundreds of nests must be destroyed every spring by felling operations in the native bush.—R. St. Paul, Minginui.