

species is indigenous to that place would appear to be settled, for introductions from the mainland are most unlikely to have been made as far back as the early years of the nineteenth century. Here, then, we are likely to have another subspecies, so far undescribed."

In December, 1847, Pucheran gave an account of the Kakapo based on a specimen sent to the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris: "C'est d'après un individu récemment envoyé au Musée de Paris par M. Jules Verreaux, l'un de ses voyageurs, que nous avons émis les réflexions qui vont suivre." Jules Verreaux (1807-1873) was one of a well-known family of natural history collectors (Salvin, 1873) and he spent some time in Australia (Iredale, 1945). It is not certain whether he visited New Zealand but it appears that he did so and that he probably collected this specimen of Kakapo in Stewart Island since Pucheran (1847: 389) noted: "L'individu que possède notre collection nationale, provient de l'île Stewart, au sud de la Nouvelle-Zélande. Mais cette espèce habite aussi dans cette dernière localité."

Williams (1960: 225) listed a specimen from the Paris Museum in this way: "Mounted specimens (6) 1 " Otago, S.I. ", 1847, *Verreaux*". M. Christian Jouanin, to whom I am indebted for this favour, sent me a copy of the labels attached to this specimen and the information given is:

"De la Nouvelle-Zélande (Otago -Mittel Island) par M. Jules Verreaux (Avril 1847. Catalogue General No. 240). Cet individu a été pris dans l'île Stewart, au sud de la Nouvelle-Zélande."

It is not clear whether Verreaux himself collected this specimen or whether a correspondent living in Otago sent it to him. The important thing seems to be that it is likely that this specimen is a genuine example of the former population of Kakapo in Stewart Island, and, like the Leiden specimens, has considerable scientific value.

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ELLIOT W. DAWSON



#### THREE KINDS OF RAILS AT MEREMERE

An apparently isolated colony of comparatively rare birds, Spotless Crake (*P. tabuensis plumbea*), Marsh Crake (*P. pusilla affinis*), and Banded Rail (*R. philippensis assimilis*), has been discovered within fifty yards of the village at the Steam Power Station at Meremere. The Spotless Crake survives here under conditions different from those thought beneficial to its welfare, i.e., narrow swamps, mostly in hilly country. The Marsh Crake could easily be expected but the Banded Rail is now considered to be rare away from coastal creeks. Nor was their discovery the end result of a painstaking and laborious search, but came about by mere chance while I was endeavouring to fill an idle hour by stalking a Bittern. The place is readily accessible for study by anyone with transport calling at my house at 6 Herewhini St., Meremere.

I established an observation point on the edge of a more or less permanent shallow pool where the birds are living throughout

the summer months and made all sight recordings from this same spot, being at times almost within touching distance of Spotless Crake. Here are some jottings from my diary:—

3rd March, 1961, 1400 hrs. One Marsh Crake came from rushes to my right and dashed across pool, closely followed, as if being chased, by two Spotless Crakes. Marsh Crake disappeared after about a minute. Spotless Crakes fed around edge of pool for some minutes, then returned to heavy swamp growth beyond pool. Heard typical strident purring rail call and another short pukeko-like, but more clear single "pip," at intervals.

4th March, 1725 hrs. One Spotless Crake appeared after a ten-minute wait, fed for a few minutes, but fled at alarm calls from Pukekos.

5th March, 1410 hrs. Water slightly deeper after rain. One Spotless Crake appeared for five minutes, feeding around edge of the 20ft. pool and making slow, short excursions into the belly-deep water; then disappeared. One Marsh Crake appeared for a couple of minutes. It seems to be the more timid and appeared to be under constant persecution by the Spotless. It left at the sudden arrival of two Spotless which fed about the pool for several minutes. This was the second and last sighting of a Marsh Crake.

March 6-18. Spotless Crakes could be seen almost any time in daylight hours except early morning; most often towards evening.

19th March. Cat-killed remains of a Spotless found on old track in tea-tree at edge of swamp close to the hide.

30th March. With H. R. McKenzie went to hide at 1615 hrs. One Spotless came at 1700 hrs. After several appearances we established that there were at least four in the area; having three under observation at once, with a fourth calling from the swamp behind us. We heard a wide range of calls, from conversational chatter to "fightin' talk," the latter already described as being typically rail-like but on a reduced scale from Banded Rail as befitting a bird of smaller stature. This call was quite similar to that of a disturbed clucky hen, indulged in when two came into close contact while feeding, when alarmed, or when aggressive. The aggressor would draw itself up to full height close to the other bird. It was seen that the white barring on the under-tail was stronger on one of the birds. It may have been a parent and the others the young of the spring. While we watched we saw four variations of what we thought were Goldfinch-Greenfinch hybrids. Fern-birds (*B. punctatus*) called near and far.

9th April. G. J. H. Moon, with H. R. McK., came to try to get photographs. From 1100 hrs. only poor sightings were had and G.J.H.M. could make only three "desperation" shots; but, while watching, he had a good view of the only Banded Rail seen. A week later Mr. J. Prickett got only sight of one Spotless Crake, but no photograph.

We tried lure calls but found the rails not very susceptible to these or other attempts to attract their attention. They were not worried by our low-pitched talking or seemingly by our presence but would panic at any sudden movement, however small, or at sudden calls of other birds. They are quite indifferent to the general noises of village life as made by a multitude of children, dogs, radiograms, "do-it-yourselfers," motor mowers, "bush mechanics" and the like, which, in a community of shift-workers, reach a level unparalleled in

most cities; as well as the general hubbub of hissing, roaring, etc., from the Power Station and the Main Trunk Railway. But any sharp noise in the immediate vicinity of their pool and the rails are most put out.

Their movement varies from a slow stalk when feeding to quick dashes, a fluttering patter across the surface of the duckweed and rarely, a short flight.

Although the character of the swamp changed with the first heavy autumn rain and was for a time the playground of Grey Duck and Black Swan the Spotless Crake could be heard in the same general area all winter and up to early September, when, it is thought, they may have moved elsewhere to breed. It is hoped that they will return and give more opportunity for pleasant study for all who wish to come.

PETER J. HOWARD



### A CHECK ON WELCOME SWALLOWS IN NORTHERN NORTHLAND

Between 24th and 26th January, 1962, Messrs. A. T. Edgar, N. Messenger and I counted Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) on the Paua-Awanui-Kaeo road. We checked all bridges on this road, and also a few on nearby sideroads, some forty-seven in all.

On 24th January we inspected all bridges from Awanui to Kaimauamau, on 25th January from Kaimauamau to Paua, and on 26th January from Kaimauamau to Kaeo. The results seem to show that the Welcome Swallow is still increasing in range and numbers.

We have been told that Mr. D. V. Merton saw a Welcome Swallow the summer before actually at Paua. Our most northerly record was of two unoccupied nests under a culvert by the Kimberley Road turnoff, some two miles north of Houhora township, and roughly opposite the top of the Houhora Harbur.

At Houhora itself two adult Swallows were seen flying out from a concrete pipe by the rubbish dump about fifty yards from the hotel. The nest contained a single fresh egg. The first bridge north of Waiharara, a wooden culvert, had one nest which contained one egg. The sideroad to Kaimauamau has three bridges. The first, a very small wooden culvert over a ditch is known locally as Shines Bridge. It had two nests underneath. One nest contained two deserted eggs. The second bridge had no sign of Swallows; but the third, yet another small wooden culvert, had no less than five nests underneath it. Four appeared to have been in recent use; one of them had been built underneath the gap between two of the bridge planks and was full of road-dust, which had buried the single egg.

The old jetty or platform at L. Ngatu, where Swallows once bred, is now almost fallen down, and no nests were found. However a single Swallow was seen flitting over the raupo. A steel girder bridge at Waipapakauri, fifty yards south of the Commercial Hotel, had a single nest beneath it, and a pair of Swallows were flitting around. Swallows were not breeding under the Awanui Bridge, where they were first recorded breeding in New Zealand (1958), but two Swallows were seen nearby. Apparently Welcome Swallows quite often frequent an old breeding area, though they no longer nest there. Here the birds were noted on their characteristic "sweeping" flights over the surrounding countryside.