

MEALY-TYPE REDPOLLS IN NORTHERN NEW ZEALAND

The very interesting paper (*Notornis* X, 61-67) in which David Stenhouse draws attention to the strong likelihood that two subspecies of Redpoll, Mealy (*Carduelis f. flammea*) and Lesser (*C. flammea cabaret*) have been established in New Zealand, probably for about a century, has prompted me to look back into my notebooks. Stenhouse's diagnosis is based on specimens obtained in the South Island, at Lincoln, Alexandra and Fiordland. It would appear that Redpolls showing strong 'Mealy' characters occur also in the North Island and may indeed be breeding north of 37°S. Lat.

On 29/8/48 Mr. H. R. McKenzie and I watched a small party of Redpolls feeding on the ground in a hollow behind the top of the beach at Kaiaua in the Firth of Thames. My note book says, "One male in fine plumage looked very pale, almost mealy!" We were looking down on the flock and I can still remember commenting on the paleness of its lower back which we were in a good position to see. H.R.McK's. notes significantly comment that "one was larger, scarlet-pink in front and generally lighter in colouring."

In late August and early September, 1962, when a study was being made of the natural history of the Mercury Islands, Redpolls were seen or heard daily about the camp at Peach Grove, Great Mercury. Often they fed on the ground. On September 6th a pair was closely watched under very favourable conditions by Mr. A. Blackburn and myself. The male was a strikingly beautiful bird with a rich rose-pink flush deepest on the breast; but there was an underlying paleness, and the lower flanks and belly were almost white. The main wing-bar was conspicuously whitish and the very pale edging to other wing-coverts left the impression of three white bars in the wing.

Soon after our return we consulted the Handbook of British Birds Vol. I, plate 8, and also 'The Birds of the British Isles,' Vol I, plates 18 and 19, by Bannerman and Lodge. The illustrations in both volumes confirmed our impression that the male we had watched on Great Mercury had such strong 'Mealy' characters that if not pure 'Mealy,' it must have been very nearly so. The female, too, in the contrast of tones in its plainer plumage, resembled rather the coloured figures of *flammea*, than of *cabaret*.

— R. B. SIBSON



REVIEW

Birds of the World, by O. L. Austin Jr.; Illustrations by A. Singer. Golden Press, New York, 1961.

Since the end of World War II there has been something of a spate of large and colourful books on birds, reflecting presumably a growing interest in ornithology and in birds as things of beauty, whose existence is only too often threatened by what is rather dubiously called the advance of civilisation. The present volume with its superb illustrations would be an ornament to any library of fine books; and the technical skill of the artist and the quality of the reproduction cannot be too highly praised. The author has travelled widely, is a world authority on some species of terns, was co-author of a checklist on the Birds of Japan, and has visited New Zealand.