

WINTERING GREENFINCHES AT ROTORUA

The Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*) is a rare breeder about Rotorua, but since the winter of 1958 real irruptions here occurred over a wide area from June to September; and 1962 was no exception.

On 29/9/62 we closely inspected two mixed flocks of passerines feeding on the lawns of the Memorial Park alongside Lake Rotorua. We estimated the flocks to contain:— 150-170 Greenfinches; 100-140 House Sparrows and 20-30 Chaffinches. A notable absentee was the Yellowhammer.

— M. J. S. BLACK
— C. D. BLOMFIELD



A CONCENTRATION OF GOLDFINCHES

On 28/10/62, at about 6 p.m., when motoring on one of the straights between Warkworth and Kaipara Flats, I came on what looked like stones on a shingly beach. For a hundred yards the full width of the road was covered closely with a gigantic flock of Goldfinches (*C. carduelis*). They were reluctant to fly. I slowed down and the air became full of them, both sides, above and underneath. Some hit the car and some hit each other when there was no flying space available. I should think by a well considered estimate that allowing fifty birds per running foot there would be fifteen thousand. The usual flock about here would number about one hundred. Why they would gather in such numbers at nesting time and sit still on a dry road gives food for thought.

This particular piece of road is favoured by Sparrows (*P. domesticus*) as a dusting area, there often being fifty to one hundred birds there in the late afternoon. For instance, on 11/11/62 at 5.45 p.m. there were the usual Sparrows, but no Goldfinches. On this occasion I did not see any. During the month following October 28th. I unsuccessfully watched for Goldfinches about the district and even the few present before that date appeared to have vanished.

— F. P. HUDSON



SPARROWS AS BEE-EATERS

At Ashburton Domain on 13/1/63, I saw House Sparrows (*P. domesticus*) catching and eating bees at a wild hive in a hollow *Sequoia gigantea*. They usually flew to the lip of the hole, picked up a bee and flew down to the ground to break it up and eat it. About ten bees were seen caught by different Sparrows in half an hour.

— W. T. POPPELWELL



COOTS IN HAWKE'S BAY

On the afternoon of 4/6/60 I visited L. Tutira with a friend who wanted to see some Black Teal (*A. novaeseelandiae*). But to my surprise some of the first birds we saw turned out to be ten Coots (*Fulica atra*) in a flock. It was their white bills that made us notice them. I was aware that Coots had been recorded at Lake Tutira before, but not in such numbers. As it was about 4 p.m. and the light was not good, we decided to return as soon as possible to make sure of what we had seen.

We paid a second visit at 2 p.m. on 11/6/60, this time having with us 7 x 30 binoculars. Using the boat, we found the Coots, ten as before, on the south side of the lake in a sheltered bay with native bush and flax around the edge, one of the first places on the lake to catch the early morning sun. We were able to row to about fifty yards from the Coots; but as we tried to draw nearer, they would take off, first running on top of the water; then flying for about 100 yards before landing.

— J. S. HEIGHWAY

On a trip through central Hawke's Bay on 24/11/62, I investigated a rumour that a pair of Coots (*Fulica atra*) had been seen on Horseshoe Lake, Patangata. This lake, as its name implies is more or less the shape of a horseshoe and so has a comparatively long shoreline for the small amount of open water. Most of the shoreline is in grass, but patches of scrub, willows and dense raupo offer plenty of cover for waterfowl. Some acres of the surface of the lake are covered with the Yellow Water-lily (*Nuphar lutea*).

A lake such as this is not easily searched at any time and on this visit the short time at my disposal, plus a strong choppy wind, precluded a thorough census. However, I did locate ten Coots, four pairs and two single birds. They were all fairly close to cover and were repeatedly diving for weed, which was plentiful. A mustelid was seen in the area where one pair of Coots seemed to be nesting.

Elsewhere in Hawke's Bay Coots have been recorded on several occasions at L. Tutira since 1954, the biggest count of ten being made by Mr. J. S. Heighway in June, 1960. There are many other lakes in the district which could harbour Coots. It should perhaps be mentioned that during the recent search for Black-fronted Dotterels (*C. melanops*), all lakes in the vicinity of Hastings, Fernhill and Taradale were examined but no Coots were seen.

— NORMAN MACKENZIE

[Although there is no mention of Coots in the North Island either in the Checklist (1953) or in Oliver (1955), they have now been recorded on at least five waters from the Wairarapa to Auckland.—Ed.]

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BLACK-FRONTED TERN AT GREYMOUTH

ON 10/11/62 I located an unusual tern for this area at the Taramakau rivermouth. It was resting with c. 170 White-fronted Terns. I was unable to get across the river to it but after long study through binoculars I decided that it was probably a Black-fronted Tern (*C. albobristatus*). Next day I checked at high tide and was lucky to find it with a small flock of White-fronted Terns. It rested on the edge of the flock and when disturbed flew away for a short time. It was easily picked from the other birds in flight by its very white rump, grey overall plumage, and apparently short tail. When fishing it just flew low over the surface and apparently picked food from the water. At rest, the orange bill was most noticeable, as were the legs of similar hue when it took off in flight. The forehead, nape, and crown were all black, and a white band ran below the black on either side of the head. The general plumage was a greyish colour. I studied the bird closely in good light while it was preening from a range of about