

## SPOTLESS CRAKE ON PONUI ISLAND

On 14/6/62, a Spotless Crake (*Porzana tabuensis*) was brought in unhurt by a cat to the home of Mr. Fred Chamberlin. My wife and I saw it and identified it there the next day. After photographs were taken by Peter Chamberlin, it was released. A few days before another Spotless Crake had been killed by the cat.

Since rail habitat is plentiful on Ponui, there could well be more of these birds, but no calls have been noticed. From time to time Banded Rails (*R. philippensis*) are seen among the mangroves in the creek. Spotless Crakes occur in hill swamps to the east of Clevedon. They are also known from the Ness Valley and may be in the swampy gullies opposite the south end of Ponui.

— H. R. McKENZIE

[Unfortunately much of our information on the distribution of the two small elusive rails *P. tabuensis* and *P. pusilla*, depends on specimens brought in by cats. Buller, writing of a "good-natured household cat" which had brought in several specimens "killed but otherwise undamaged," comments: "Surely this cat merits an apotheosis in the Colonial Museum!" However, despite the menace of cats and rats, these rails are far from extinct.—Ed.]

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## PREDATION ON FAIRY PRIONS

On 20/8/61 as I was going for a walk on The Brothers Island, Cook Strait, I heard the alarm call of a Fairy Prion (*P. turtur*) coming from a patch of taupata scrub along the south bank and without difficulty located the burrow from which the agitated sounds were issuing. When I was about to put my hand down the burrow, a Tuatara appeared at the entrance with a feather in its mouth. I made the Tuatara go back down the burrow; and when the loud protests again came from within, the Tuatara re-appeared at the entrance still with the feather in its mouth.

After the Tuatara had moved away, I put my hand down the burrow and received a severe pecking. I then took out a Fairy Prion; but again there were sounds in the burrow and I brought out a second Fairy Prion. They were evidently a mated pair. There was no egg. Both birds settled down quietly when returned to the burrow.

On the afternoon of 28/10/61, I saw a Harrier (*C. approximans*) rise from a small bush of taupata, carrying in its claws a bird which at first glance looked like a Diving Petrel (*P. urinatrix*), but I had my doubts as no Diving Petrels burrow in this part of the island. I followed the Harrier for about 120 yards up the slope towards the lighthouse, and found the remains of a Fairy Prion. All the feathers had been stripped off the body, the head was missing and the body still bleeding; tail and wings were intact. Feathers were scattered over the top of the taupata scrub where the Harrier had landed.

Returning to the spot where the Harrier had first been seen, I found the head in a clump of weed with a trail of feathers leading to the burrow at the end of which was a Fairy Prion's egg. The burrow, which turned sharply, was 14 inches long. I could not help wondering how the Harrier had known the Prion was in the burrow and how it had got it to the entrance.

At The Brothers, Harriers have been seen carrying young Red-billed Gulls also.

— ALAN WRIGHT