

BROWN TEAL (*ANAS CASTANEA CHLOROTIS*) AT LITTLE BARRIER ISLAND

By R. H. BLANSHARD

The first records I have been able to obtain are from Mr. L. Hardgrave (*pers. comm.* to H. R. McKenzie), who lived on the island from Nov. 1932 until Jan. 1944. Two Brown Teal were seen near the house for perhaps a week or two until the creek dried up. Another two stayed for three or four weeks near the grave of the late R. Hunter-Blair, at the little creek which debouches onto the flat but goes no further. Neither two had any young. These sightings were thought to be about 1938 and 1939 respectively.

From 1st Feb. 1944 to 14th Nov. 1958, Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Parkin, caretaking on the Island, noted Brown Teal several times, at least twice with young (*pers. comm.* to H. R. McK.). It was not known how the young fared. As sightings of odd birds or pairs were rare it could well be assumed that they were not then permanent residents. *Notornis* Vol. 6, p. 199, contains a record by C. H. Parkin of one found in Nov. 1954, in fern c. 200 yards from the sea. Odd birds were seen occasionally after that date.

Since the writer has been on the Island (since Nov. 1958), sightings of the Brown Teal have been frequent enough to conclude that it may now be regarded as a permanent inhabitant of the bird community, particularly since it has occurred at practically every month of the year. It is, however, by no means common.

The first sighting by the writer or his family occurred on 2/1/59 when an injured adult bird was found at the mouth of the Waipawa Stream, near the West Landing. This bird had a broken left femur and though splinted and placed in a warm dry cage where it appeared to thrive for four days, it suddenly looked most bedraggled and died.

On 12/6/60 in the late afternoon, my children observed one adult with two young on a pool in Te Waikohare Stream, about 100 yards upstream from the house (*Notornis*, Vol. 9, p. 240).

The next sighting was on 27/11/60 in a pool of Tirikakawa Stream by my son David (Vol. 9, p. 240).

22/4/61, 10.30 p.m., three adult birds were seen in running stream near pumphouse. When approached they ran into the bush and dispersed under fallen nikau palm fronds. On the way back to the house a further two ducks were seen clearly in the bright moonlight foraging quietly among the rushes beside the cattle night-paddock.

The most interesting sighting occurred at 8.45 p.m. on 16/10/61 when a complete family of ducks was observed on the banks of Te Waikohare Stream, near the outlet of the cowshed drain. My wife first heard their calls, which at first sounded like the soft mewing of a cat and later more like a purring, and punctuated by occasional piping calls. These led us to the family which was foraging in the mud at the drainage outlet. Conditions at that time were dry elsewhere. The writer, in company with Mrs. Blanshard and Mr. P. Harper, clearly saw them by torchlight, which alarmed them. The male flew away and the female led the brood of nine ducklings up the bank towards the cover of the rushes. All moved very quickly and silently. The young appeared to be three to four days old if compared in size

and movement with domestic ducklings. As the young dispersed the adult bird flew at me, uttering wild cries and flopping around as if wounded, apparently trying to distract my attention while the young took cover. As reference authorities quote five to seven young as the usual brood, diminishing through mishap as they journey down the creeks, it may be assumed that this was an unusually good brood and probably hatched close to the place of observation.

The following morning, before 9 a.m. on 17/10/61, David Blanshard sighted an adult duck flying into the bush at the entrance to the pumphouse stream.

20/11/61, one adult with two young, approximately half adult size, were seen by my children at the mouth of Te Waikohare Stream just before dusk. Piping calls were heard in the same area for some evenings following.

On 11/5/62, during the visit of the Okato Boys' High School Group, led by Mr. Maurice Macdonald, two adult ducks were sighted in the rushes near the pumphouse about 10 p.m. One bird was caught, examined by all, photographed and released. We noticed a tendency for the bird to dive into a rush and crouch there motionless.

On 21/5/63 at 4.45 p.m., my daughter Gena found an adult duck swimming on a flooded pool in Te Waikohare Stream near the house. It is unusual to see this bird in such open conditions by daylight on the Island. It did not mind our presence and waited long enough, 10 or 12 minutes, for me to get my camera and photograph it in colour. It finally moved up-stream out of our sight.

6/8/62, 6.15 p.m., a pair on flooded pools at mouth of Te Waikohare. They remained while darkness fell and were heard until late that evening. On 7th and 8th they were heard calling again and were seen by torchlight by Susan Blanshard. It was hoped to find the nest site but this eluded our search and, fearing to disturb the pair, we decided to await results.

21/9/62, 2.5 p.m., while playing on the boulder bank in front of our house my children came upon a group of four young ducklings foraging among the bracken and weed growing on the stones. At 3 p.m. I found a single duckling crouched among the cacti beside our front gate. This was photographed (Vol. 10, p. 122).

18/11/62, 9.30 p.m., Lt. Norris, R.N., sighted two adults by powerful torchlight in the Te Waikohare Stream mouth.

On 12/1/62 Susan Blanshard saw two in the stream again and later a single bird which at 10.30 a.m. was searching among the boulders of the dry stream bed. This bird did not fly when approached but scrambled unhurriedly over the stones upstream, allowing me to photograph it as it finally climbed the bank and moved into the bush cover.

It is evident that the Brown Teal has not always been present and its self-introduction to the Sanctuary has been a gradual and possibly accidental process. The nearest known habitats from which this colonisation could be expected are Waipu, 36 miles, and Great Barrier, 11 miles. The lack of permanent swamps and open water offers a relatively poor habitat for this species so that its apparently successful and permanent establishment demonstrates the value of the complete protection afforded by the Little Barrier Island.

It is noted that most of the sightings have been about the "flat." In this area the boulder bank offers poor feeding, the Waipawa and the Te Waikohare Streams have beds which are boulder strewn and are often dry, and the two blind creeks debouching onto the flat are dry most of the time; but food is found because of some moisture at the mouths of the streams, by the cowshed drain and at times on wet parts of the flat where there is some quite heavy growth. Another attraction to this area could well be the limited pastures where this species loves to feed at night. Further east the Tirikakawa and the Awaroa Streams have permanent water but hardly any flat land at their mouths, being bushed down to the boulder beach. They should suit the Blue Duck admirably. It would seem therefore that the Brown Teal population will be limited by the natural factors but it seems reasonable to hope that its presence will be permanent.



SHORT NOTES

GREENSHANKS AT FAREWELL SPIT

On 25/11/63 I visited Farewell Spit with Mrs. P. Moncrieff and other members of the Abel Tasman National Park Board. Although little time was spent on bird observation, we did examine one large group of waders resting on the flats inside the Spit near the lighthouse. While standing on a small sand dune watching these waders, mainly godwit, we heard the distinctive call of a Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*).

Two Greenshanks were seen flying from the base of the Spit. They flew across in front of and below us, giving an excellent view of the white stripe up the back and the feet extending beyond the tail. The birds landed in a runnel within 25 yards of us and it was a little while before the dull green legs could be seen. The birds flushed again and continued on towards the end of the Spit. This appears to be the first record of the Greenshank from Farewell Spit and adds a further species to the already large list from that notable wader haunt.

— B. D. BELL



LONG SWIM BY N.I. WEKA

It is fairly well known that creeks and small patches of water present no obstacle to the North Island Weka (*Gallirallus australis greyi*), but the following record of a longer swim is of interest, as it is without doubt an unusual observation.

Late in January, 1964, I saw a bird a few feet from the bank of the Waimata River, Gisborne, swimming strongly towards the opposite bank. It had a Grebe-like appearance, with head and neck thrust well forward, upper part of the back awash, and the rump high in the air. A dash to the house for binoculars was called for, and my suspicions of the swimmer's identity were confirmed.

At that state of the tide, the river was approximately 60 yards wide, and the Weka covered the distance in about 90 seconds, then making a quick dart for cover.

— A. BLACKBURN