

## FIELD STUDY WEEK-END, CANTERBURY

### 25th - 28th October, 1963

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Considering the amazing distances and amount of study our Regional Organiser manages to cover with our daily or week-end trips, it was no surprise that a full three-day study course ran smoothly over many miles of riverbed, swamp, plain and gorge.

This was not arranged without a great deal of thorough planning by Dick Jackson and his committee. For us locals, a 4 a.m. start is routine, but this time plans had to fit with the arrival of the south train, steamer express and planes. However, everything fell into place and we all gathered as arranged at 9.15 a.m. Saturday morning. To put us on our mettle, Mr. Graham Turbott took us to see New Zealand's important newcomer to the South Island — the Cattle Egret. This was a highlight for most members and we hosts took it as a good omen for the rest of the week-end.

On then, in convoy to Ken Rowe's at Rangiora. Here we had welcome morning tea, while we sorted out and introduced a total of thirty-one members, including visitors from as far afield as Wellington and Dunedin. All were given maps showing the complete course of the Ashley River from the Gorge Bridge to the Main Road. This course was divided among five groups, each with a leader and named helpers. Every effort was made to allocate the visitors to different groups and transport, to ensure their mixing with all the members. A driver of each group was deputed to pick up transport at the finish of each length and transport his part to the main finishing point on the main road.

So, on an ideal day for sauntering and enjoyment, the groups set off on their beats of five or six miles. These beats could not, of course, take into account steep banks, deep swift-flowing main streams, greasy beds and other obstacles, and there were many diversions, not always intentional, either overland or underwater. The variety of large and small boulders, shingle, sand, mud, warm and cold water, gave no excuse for sore feet, however, and in due course, over a period of about one and a half hours, everyone emerged at the main check point. Having had only a brief break for lunch, all seemed to be of one mind — so in convoy again to Hills Road for an overdue 7.30 p.m. buffet tea at Davis's.

After tea, the results of the five groups were collated on a large map for all to see. There were thirty-eight species, twenty of which were mainly river-dwelling birds, totalling 3,931. These were Black Shag (7), White-faced Heron (43), Bittern (1), Canada Goose (1), Paradise Duck (18), Grey Duck (37), Mallard and Various Species (89), South Island Pied Oystercatcher (118), Banded Dotterel (285), Red-capped Dotterel (2) and Chicks (5), Pied Stilt (122), Black-backed Gull (570), Black-billed Gull (1986), Black-fronted Tern (254), Caspian Tern (6), White-fronted Tern (2), Harrier (13), Magpie (48), Rock Pigeon (412). Passerines, bank dwellers or birds seen overhead were, in order of conspicuousness, Chaffinch, Redpoll, Grey Warbler, Yellowhammer, Goldfinch, Blackbird, Hedgesparrow, Thrush, Bellbird, Pipit, Skylark, Starling, Kingfisher, Silvereye, Sparrow, Shining Cuckoo, Greenfinch and Quail. Young were seen of the Paradise Duck, Grey Duck, Oystercatcher, Banded Dotterel, Red-capped Dotterel.

At 10 a.m. Sunday everyone met enthusiastically to visit the flat expanse of Lake Ellesmere, under the leadership of Geoff. Tunnidcliffe. To check the efficiency of the drivers, he led us on a circuitous route to reach the Selwyn II, where we were spread in line abreast to assess the density of nesting in the area. Nineteen Pukeko nests, some with chicks, were recorded, and also duck, swan, Canada Goose and Pied Stilt nests. This was a gentle break-in for the afternoon's work at Hart's Creek where, in a chill wind, one walked knee deep and waist deep or jumped from clump to clump in an everglades of water and raupo. Many nests of Pukeko, Black Swan, Mute Swan and Canada Goose were found. Though Bittern were seen, no nest was found. Only when a group sheltering in the raupo while watching a Swan nest realised the wind had added six inches to the water level, did we feel it was time to leave this fascinating place.

On Monday the group met at the Museum at 6 a.m. for the 60-mile trip to the area where Marj. Davis had begun a study of the Wrybill. Again the weather was kind, and the visitors were able to see much of this unique bird, of its chicks in various stages, and of its fascinating parental behaviour. After lunch we were led by Dick Jackson to view the Black Shag colony on the Rakaia Gorge cliffs, while he and three nimble companions braved the now gale-force wind to climb down to inspect the nursery in the cleft half-way down the four hundred-foot cliff. Some of the watchers felt this to be the highlight of the week-end.

We must offer our thanks to our Regional Organiser, Dick Jackson, his committee, the drivers of the transport, those who made the billets so hospitable, the group leaders and female helpers.

— M. M. D.



#### LIST OF REGIONAL ORGANISERS, O.S.N.Z.

1964/65

- FAR NORTH: A. T. Edgar, Inlet Road, Kerikeri (Acting)  
 NORTHLAND: A. T. Edgar, Inlet Road, Kerikeri (Acting)  
 AUCKLAND: M. J. Hogg, 27 Woodside Crescent, St. Heliers,  
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 SOUTH AUCKLAND: H. R. McKenzie, P.O. Box 45, Clevedon  
 WAIKATO: Mrs. M. L. Templer, 14 Bond Street, Claudlands, Hamilton  
 BAY OF PLENTY: R. Weston, 250 River Road, Kawerau  
 VOLCANIC PLATEAU: R. W. Jackson, 9 Kenrick Road, Rotorua  
 GISBORNE-WAIROA: A. Blackburn, 10 Score Road, Gisborne  
 TARANAKI: M. G. Macdonald, 195 Mangorei Road, New Plymouth  
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