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SHORT NOTE

TWO FORMS OF REDPOLL IN HIGH COUNTRY

At a Field Study Course held at Rotorua last Labour Week-end (1963), it was brought to my notice that the status of the Redpoll in this country was under review. I was informed that besides the Lesser Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea cabaret*) the nominate race the Mealy Redpoll (*Carduelis f. flammea*) was also thought to be present. I have some information of my own which I would like to add in support of this opinion.

Before I moved to Rotorua I lived on a sheep station between the upper reaches of the Rangitikei and the Ngaruroro on the Napier-Taihape road. Here Redpolls were very common; each year in the early spring large flocks of them would be seen about the homestead feeding on the willow trees that had just come into leaf. They would stay for about three months until December, when they dispersed for breeding.

I used to keep them under close observation, and was after a while struck by the fact that among all the smaller Redpolls there were certain birds that looked definitely larger and more conspicuous. These larger birds were never common, one or two only being present in a flock of twenty birds. They were more shy and tended to keep apart from the smaller redpolls, and were usually observed sitting out on a branch by themselves. In appearance not only did they look larger, but the rosy colouring on the breast was spread over a wider area, with the white on the lower abdomen more conspicuous than in the smaller Redpolls. I had no opportunity to observe them from the rear, nor was I able to distinguish any female birds that matched them in size.

I at first took them to be Linnets (*C. cannabina*) as according to the reference books I had at that time, Linnets were still considered to be present in New Zealand. However, as the description of the Linnet did not appear to fit these birds, I was forced to the conclusion that the larger birds were older, and that the smaller ones had yet to reach maturity. I consequently thought no more of the matter until I was told just recently that there might be two subspecies of redpoll in New Zealand.

— HAMISH LYALL