

# HEAPHY TRACK SURVEY

By DAVID G. DAWSON

A party consisting of Sally E. Symes, Pamela D. Symes, Jenny A. McPherson, Lois J. Bishop, Brian D. Bell (leader), and the author walked the Heaphy track in the period Jan. 7th 1964 - Jan. 14th. Notes were kept of all birds seen and also several counts were made. Most of the following notes are from the observations of the latter three members (all members of O.S.N.Z.). Weather conditions were poor: mainly variable S.W. winds with showers or heavy rain on every day except the 14th. This paper presents the results of the counts. A list of all birds seen with notes on their status in the area has been sent to the Recording Scheme.

Williams (1960) describes the Goulund Downs and its birds in detail. The status of birds on the downs seems little changed, except that the Harrier and N.Z. Pigeon were added to the list of recently recorded birds. The Pigeon, which was seen in all bush on the downs except the beech, was perhaps most common in the varied bush near

TABLE 1

	Total	Oystercatcher	Unidentified	Hedge Sparrow	Tit	Fantail	Blackbird	Silvereye	Thrush	Bellbird	No. of Stops	Observer
1:	46	0	0	0	0	2	6	32	1	5	5	B.D.B.
2:	30	0	0	0	0	5	6	12	2	5	5	L.J.B.
3:	46	2	2	2	5	0	5	14	7	9	5	D.G.D.
	122	2	2	2	5	7	17	58	10	19		Total
	100	1.6	1.6	1.6	4.1	5.7	14	48	8.2	16		% of Total
	8	.13	.13	.13	.33	.45	1.1	3.9	.67	1.3		Av. per count

TABLE 2

	Total	Pigeon	Tui	Chaffinch	Tit	Fantail	Blackbird	Silvereye	Grey Warbler	Bellbird	No. of Stops	Observer
5:	46	1	3	5	4	4	3	12	7	7	4	D.G.D.
6:	40	1	8	1	5	4	0	14	0	7	4	L.J.B.
7:	7	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	2	2	1	B.D.B.
	93	2	11	8	9	9	3	26	9	16		Total
	100	2.2	12	8.6	10	10	3.2	28	10	17		% of Total
	10.3	.2	1.2	.9	1	1	.33	2.9	1	1.8		Av. per count

the Lewis hut. Harriers were seen along the coast, and a lone bird on the downs.

The counts were carried out in the manner outlined by H.R.McK. (i.e. the "bush bird census" of Turbott and Bull) with three minutes' wait and five minutes' counting at each stop. Tables 1 to 4 summarise the results of these counts. Table 1 is of a count made up low ridges immediately east of the Heaphy hut: the weather was overcast and warm, with one shower. The counts were conducted between 1530 and 1645 hrs. The bush was rain forest with Rata (*Metrosideros robusta* and *M. umbellata*) dominant: subdominants Mahoe (*Meliclytus ramiflorus*)

TABLE 3

Observer	---	---	D.G.D.	D.G.D.	Total	% of Total	Av. per count
No. of Stops	---	3	6				
Thrush	---	2	3	5	7.2	.55	
Grey Warbler	---	4	1	5	7.2	.55	
Silveryeye	---	1	7	8	12	.9	
Blackbird	---	3	3	6	8.7	.67	
Fantail	---	2	0	2	2.9	.22	
Tit	---	1	4	5	7.2	.55	
Hedge Sparrow	---	3	0	3	4.3	.33	
Chaffinch	---	2	7	9	13	1	
Bellbird	---	1	0	1	1.4	.11	
Rifleman	---	6	15	21	30	2.3	
L.T. Cuckoo	---	1	0	1	1.4	.11	
Redpoll	---	0	2	2	2.9	.22	
Unidentified	---	0	1	1	1.4	.11	
Total	---	26	43	69	100	7.7	

8: 9:

TABLE 4

Observer	---	---	D.G.D.	D.G.D.	Total	% of Total	Av. per count
No. of Stops	---	13	8				
Kea	---	0	1	1	1.4	.05	
Unidentified	---	2	2	4	5.8	.19	
Tit	---	1	1	2	2.9	.10	
Redpoll	---	3	4	7	10	.33	
Skylark	---	6	4	10	15	.48	
Pipit	---	7	5	12	18	.57	
Fernbird	---	4	4	8	12	.38	
Bellbird	---	4	1	5	7.2	.24	
Chaffinch	---	4	3	7	10	.33	
Thrush	---	1	0	1	1.4	.05	
Grey Warbler	---	2	5	7	10	.33	
Hedge Sparrow	---	1	3	4	5.8	.19	
Weka	---	1	0	1	1.4	.05	
Total	---	36	33	69	100	3.3	

10: 11:

and Kamahi (*Weinmannia racemosa*), with Kiekie (*Freycinetia banksii*) forming a shrub layer. 8/1/64.

Table 2 is of a count made up the ridge upon which the Lewis hut is situated. The weather was overcast with steady rain, but warm. The three counts were all conducted between 1000 and 1050 hrs. The bush was rain forest with Quintinia (*Quintinia acutifolia*) and Kamahi as dominants and emergent Rimu (*Dacrydium cupressinum*), with less Kiekie as a shrub layer. 10/1/64.

Table 3 is of a count made along the Heaphy track in the patch of bush immediately west of the Downs hut. Count 8 was made on 13/1/64 and 9 on 12/1/64: on both days the weather was cool with few showers. Between them the counts cover the period 1350 - 1715 hrs. The bush was mountain beech (*Nothofagus solandri cliffortioides*), surrounded by divaricating scrub which would be in hearing about half the time.

Table 4 is of a count made along the Heaphy track immediately through the patch of bush of table 3. Count 10 was made on 12/1/64 and 11 on 13/1/64, with the same weather as for 8 and 9. Both counts fall within the period 1415 - 1630 hrs. The vegetation was Red Tussock (*Chionochloa rigida*) with subdominant divaricating shrubs.

For each bird species at each counting area the average number recorded at each stop has been calculated: this is the best index of population density for comparison with other areas. It is hoped the counts will provide a basis for comparison in future years and also give a more quantitative idea of numbers than is usual.

However, it must be remembered that weather, time of day, and (most important) time of year produce significant differences in the index for the same population. A general result is that the three bush areas had essentially similar bird indices: 8, 10.3, and 7.7 birds per stop respectively, while the tussock area had the smaller index of 3.3 when its birds are on the whole more conspicuous.



## SHORT NOTE

### SPUR-WINGED PLOVER BREEDING IN CANTERBURY

On 17th November, 1963, Mr. R. Novis, ranger to the North Canterbury Acclimatisation Society, reported to Canterbury Museum the presence of a pair of strange birds which were evidently nesting on the tussock flats of Lake Station at the head (N.W. end) of Lake Taylor (Hawarden district, North Canterbury). Mr. Novis noted that the birds were performing distraction display but the nest could not be found. They were readily identified from his description as Spur-winged Plovers. In early December E.K.S.R. examined the area without finding the nest, but it was found shortly after this by a lad, Ken Allingham, on a visit to the area. Ken Allingham reported his find to E.K.S.R. and had noted that the nest contained a newly-hatched chick and one egg.

On about 20th April, 1964, three adults were seen flying together in the same locality by Mr. D. Maindonald (N. Canterbury Acclimatisation Society ranger), presumably the parents and grown chick.

A further record was sent in to the Museum by Mr. W. J. Harris who, on 7th November, 1963, saw a pair on the Clarence River bed to the north of Jack's Pass (N. of Hanmer): it was not known whether these were breeding.

— E. K. S. ROWE & E. G. TURBOTT