

ANNUAL FIELD STUDY WEEK-END NEW PLYMOUTH, 24th - 26th OCTOBER, 1964

On the Friday night from 7.30 p.m. on members began to gather at the New Plymouth Girls' High School to greet old friends and meet new, in an atmosphere that, while very pleasant inside, was rather damp outside.

The rear wall of the physics laboratory, which was the centre for the week-end's activities, was attractively set out with photographs by Mr. A. Brandon, who spends much of his free time photographing birds in the New Plymouth area. We were most grateful for the use of this building and for the use we were able to make of the school canteen.

At 9 p.m. Mr. M. G. Macdonald, R.Repr. for Taranaki, welcomed those present. Programmes for the week-end were explained, and everyone was disappointed to learn that because of high seas the trip to the off-shore islands would be off.

On Saturday morning, despite decidedly miserable weather, there were over 50 people at the school, making this the largest week-end course so far. Mr. A. Blackburn, President, greeted everyone, and in a short address gave an insight into the planning and difficulties of the Kermadecs Expedition. Following notices of apologies for absence, Mr. Macdonald explained the position of the local beaches and the type of beach the visitors would encounter, with a few extra directions for those who might get lost in the city area.

Mr. A. B. Scanlan, editor of the Taranaki Herald and an O.S.N.Z. member, then gave a lecture on the "Sugar Loaf Islands," explaining their geological beginnings and early history, with particular reference to Maori occupation and the interest the early colonists found in them. It was most disappointing that the island trip could not be made, for interest in the area was certainly raised by this excellent lecture, and by the slides which were screened afterwards, showing the islands in summer conditions, the season when Diving Petrels, Red-billed gulls and White-fronted terns have been banded during the past few years.

In the afternoon, though still in unseasonal low cloud and high winds, parties were out to all beaches from Waitara to Paritutu. Welcome Swallows which were in this district last July were not found, but as the groups returned to rendezvous at Port Taranaki, the lists of birds sighted and specimens collected began to grow. Quite the most interesting sighting was that of two Godwits, *Limosa lapponica baueri*, noted by H. R. McKenzie to be quite at home on the north bank of the Waitara River. This species, though suspected in the area, had not been positively recorded before. Later B. Hankins and C. Templer also saw two Godwits on the Fitzroy beach, apparently newly arrived. Other species recorded were: 9 Banded Dotterel, 100+ Red-billed Gulls, 70+ Black-backed Gulls, 3 Pied Stilts, 2 Black Shags, 6 Caspian Terns, 4 White-fronted Terns, 1 Dunnock, 20 Yellowhammers, 30 Skylarks, 10 Pipits, 12 Silvereyes; also both Gannets and Petrels were noted working out at sea.

On Saturday evening at the Taranaki Museum, members listened to a lecture by Dr. A. Buist, of Hawera. An archaeologist in his spare time, Dr. Buist gave the history of the excavation of Moa Hunter sites at Ohawe and Kaupokonui, and with slides and specimens showed

examples of recoveries made. Some bones recovered showed that birds of quite considerable size had existed in this area, and also that the Maori had used other now extinct birds as food. Species identified from these sites include 8 species of Moa: *Pachyornis mappini*; *P. septentrionalis*; *Euryapteryx geranoides*; *E. tane*; *E. curtus*; *Anomalapteryx didiformis*; *Dinornis giganteus*; and *D. gazella*.

There was also evidence that many other birds had been used as food as other bones identified were of: Little Weka (*Gallirallus minor*); Takahē (*Notornis mantelli*); N.Z. Coot (*Palacolinna hodgei*); Finsch's Duck (*Euryanas finschi*); N.I. Goose (*Cnemidornis septentrionalis*); N.Z. Eagle (*Harpagornis assimilis*); N.Z. Crow (*Palaeocorax moriorum*); Huia (*Heteralocha acutirostris*); a *Circus* species, and many other birds which are still present in our bush to-day.

Later the audience moved from the lecture room to the museum proper, where Dr. Buist explained related exhibits. With our thanks to Dr. Buist expressed by Mr. McGrath, an enjoyable day ended.

Though Egmont remained well hidden on Sunday morning, the whole party was soon away to Puketi Rhododendron Trust, where, following a short address by the curator, Mr. R. Hair, we divided to spend the remainder of the morning in the extensive gardens and bush of the Trust. Lunch was taken in the basement of the lodge (out of the rain), where we listened to a recorded interview of Mr. A. Blackburn and Mr. H. R. McKenzie with 2XP.

From here, after a short talk on the bird life of Egmont National Park, by the chief ranger, Mr. Atkinson, we moved on to the slopes of Egmont. One group went to the Upper Puniho Road, a second to the Dover Road Mill site, both parties to take a census of bush birds and to investigate the likelihood of Kokako. Although Mr. Atkinson had mentioned that Whiteheads could be considered absent from Egmont, the Puniho Road party reported having heard Whiteheads close by. Birds recorded were: Rifleman, Tui, Pied Tit, Bush Pigeon, Fantail, Kingfisher, Grey Warbler, Silvereye and Blackbird.

On Sunday evening at the High School everyone assembled again for an interesting evening of tape recordings by J. Kendrick and M. Macdonald and the showing of films.

On Monday morning, in the first sunshine of the course, everyone assembled for the last time at the school. From here many set off for home, some Aucklanders to look into the Okau area in North Taranaki where Whitehead and Kaka may be found. Another group from Hamilton set out via the Waitaanga, Kokako, area. Those remaining spent the morning either at Blue Penguin nests along the coast or in trying to track down and positively identify a most elusive wader which had been sighted by several members earlier in the course. Further specimens were brought in from these patrols. Specimens gathered over the week-end were: Short-tailed Shearwater, Little Blue Penguin, Fairy Prion, and Red-billed Gull.

Our thanks go to New Plymouth, and to Maurice Macdonald in particular, who spent so much time organising this week-end. As Mr. Blackburn pointed out at the final meeting, it was due to this organisation and planning for all conditions, that the course was able to continue successfully even with the continuous bad weather. I am sure that all who attended gained not only from bird observations, but also from the exchange of ideas and from contact with other members.