

CATTLE EGRETS NEAR LEVIN

On 30/7/64 I was on my way to Hokio Beach when I stopped for a look at the birds at the southern end of Horowhenua Lake. Among them were five small egrets, three standing close together among the reeds at the edge of the lake and two on a fence, preening.

It was impossible to make a close approach on account of the swampy nature of the ground and from a distance of nearly quarter of a mile I took the birds to be Little Egrets. I had seen one of these on several occasions on the east side of the lake in April, and had been able to examine it at close quarters.

When I returned that way an hour later, the birds were feeding in a paddock, in a way which made me think of Cattle Egrets. I could not see the colour of their bills, and as they had blackish legs and entirely white plumage, I still took them to be Little Egrets.

On 1/8/64 I saw the five of them feeding in a paddock among sheep, and their small size was very apparent.

A week later, after some preliminary enquiries, I accompanied Mr. C. H. Crawford down through his farm and was able to get within about a hundred yards of the birds and examine them through a 27x telescope. The legs were dark greenish-grey, and the bill, which was stouter and less sharply pointed than that of a Little Egret, was light yellow with a tinge of orange or pinkish colour, hard to describe, but quite different from the clear golden-yellow of the White Heron. The skin of the face appeared to be the same colour as the bill. The heavy chin was very noticeable, and when a bird was on the alert, the feathers of the crown were either elevated or formed a crest, giving the appearance of a high forehead.

I wrote to Dr. Falla and he agreed with my identification of these birds as Cattle Egrets.

Mr. Crawford told me that the birds had been there since the autumn. One appeared in February, two more later and another two later still, making five in all. They used to follow his cows about the paddocks until he moved them to another property; then, he said, they followed those of his neighbour, Mr. Procter.

On 26/8/64 I went down through Mr. Procter's farm and saw the birds again, but they were shy and difficult to approach.

Eventually, I made my way down a fence line while the birds were perched on the lower end of the fence and on posts over the water, and was able to see that they were still in all-white non-breeding plumage.

Mr. Procter has noticed them feeding among sheep and pigs as well as among cattle.

On 17/9/64 I was able to approach them within about sixty yards. This time they seemed to be assuming their breeding plumage, as two of them had a tinge of salmon pink on the front of the head. The bills were now of a golden-yellow colour, like that of the White Heron, and the legs, though still black below the knee, were of a light grey above.

While I was watching them, they were joined by a Little Egret and I was able to make a comparison between the two species. In a light breeze the Cattle Egrets appeared loose-feathered and rather shaggy beside the trim and slender Little Egret. The difference in the length

and shape of the bill was very evident; that of the Little Egret being longer, more slender and sharply pointed.

When feeding, the Cattle Egrets kept to the grass near the water, while the Little Egret waded in water up to its knees.

I had another look at them on 30/9/64 while they were feeding among cattle, and although I could not get very close, I could see that the head of one of them was of a distinct buff colour. When alarmed on this occasion, they flew over my head and alighted on a macrocarpa tree.

— E. B. JONES



REPORTED LITTLE BITTERN AT MEREMERE

Re the article "Little Bittern at Meremere," P. J. Howard, *Notornis* X, 317-319, and the further article "Note on Little Bittern," Dr. R. A. Falla, *Notornis* X, 412-413. Since this identification is now doubtful the parties concerned are studying the matter more deeply, with valued help from Dr. R. A. Falla and Mr. E. G. Turbott, and it is hoped to publish the findings later.

— P. J. HOWARD, J. L. KENDRICK, H. R. MCKENZIE



PLUMAGE OF BLACK FANTAIL

Oliver's *N.Z. Birds* (2nd ed., p. 495) implies that the female Black Fantail (*Rhipidura f. fuliginosa*) may be distinguished from the male by the presence of white spots over the ear coverts. Brian Bell, however (*pers. comm.*), had his doubts. That his doubts were justified was demonstrated by my observation of a mated pair of Black Fantails both of which showed white spots. This pair had four eggs and reared four young. The nest was visited frequently and only the two birds were in attendance. The remote possibility of a polygamous nesting with, by chance, only the two females being seen, may confidently be excluded.

The presence of white spots over the ear coverts of the Black Fantail, therefore, does not necessarily mean that the individual is a female.

— M. F. SOPER



OBITUARY

Major Robert Adams Wilson, D.S.O., who died at his home 'Lethenty,' Bulls, on 27th November 1964, in his 89th year, was a New Zealander distinguished in many fields of interest and of enterprise. A son of the late Sir James Wilson, a Rangitikei pioneer, he was borne at Bulls in 1875 and educated at Wanganui College. In the years before World War I, he was engaged in establishing saw-mills along the newly-opened main trunk line and for recreation playing in a Rangitikei Polo Team which won the Saville Cup. After military service with the Royal Garrison Artillery 1916-18, he took up farming in his home district and made a success of developing coastal sandhill country and establishing impressive records with Friesian dairy cattle. Within the limits of a life-span of near four score years and ten, he found time for zestful participation in such active sports as wildfowl shooting and deerstalking, maintained a consistent skill at bridge, an