

NOTE ON WELCOME SWALLOWS IN NORTHLAND

By J. E. C. FLUX and P. R. WILSON*

From 19 to 22 February, 1965, we looked for nests of Welcome Swallows (*Hirundo neoxena*) under all bridges on 230 miles of main road between Hikurangi and Cape Reinga, North Auckland. The aim was to duplicate and extend the swallow survey reported by Skegg (1962), in the hope that the number of nests under road bridges might be useful as an index of population changes at the centre of this newly established species' breeding range; so often only the advancing front of an expanding distribution is mapped. Even a rough estimate of the breeding density of swallows at various times during their spread would be of great interest. Viewing conditions were good, and only a few bridges are so long or complex that they cannot be examined completely. Table 1 summarises the information collected.

TABLE 1

Route	Mileage	No. Bridges	Swallows Seen	Intact Nests	Broken Nests
Cape Reinga-Awanui	67	18	19	5	0
Awanui-Kao-Pakaraka	67	29	20	1	6
Awanui-Kaitaia-Ohaeawai	56	17	13	1	0
Kaikohe-Ohaeawai-Hikurangi	40	31	13	5	15
Total	230	95	65	12	21

Of the eight intact nests we could reach, two contained single eggs and one a clutch of three. One nest was built flat on top of a horizontal steel girder, four miles north of where a similar type of nest was found by Skegg at Houhora in 1962: the others were on vertical faces with no support below. Only three bridges had more than two nests, the maximum being nine broken nests on the first bridge south of Waiomio. The swallows were in groups of 13, 11 and 5, four groups of 3 and nine of 2; six single birds were also seen. Four-fifths of the birds were observed during stops at bridges.

Since the first two pairs were recorded breeding in New Zealand in 1958 (Michie, 1959) swallows have increased in numbers and range rapidly. Ross (1962) reported flocks of up to about 100 birds at Kaikohe by February, 1962, and isolated nesting has occurred at Lake Ellesmere and Hawke's Bay (Hankins, 1963). In a fortnight's tour of known swallow haunts in February, 1961, Edgar (1962) saw only 28 birds, compared with the 65 which we saw in the same district on our rapid three-day visit. However, the number of nests on the route Pua-Awanui-Kao has not increased much in the past three years, although the number of birds seen has trebled, as shown in Table 2.

* Animal Ecology Division, D.S.I.R., Lower Hutt

TABLE 2

Author	Date	No. Bridges	Swallows Seen	Whole Nests	Broken Nests	Nests per Bridge
Skegg (1962)	24-26/1/62	43	11	4	4	0.19
Present survey	19-22/2/65	36	37	5	4	0.25

Nests which Skegg stated were on side roads have been omitted in this comparison, but the discrepancy in the number of bridges examined may indicate that some are still included, or that we missed a few on our survey.

We would like to thank Dr. P. C. Bull, Mr. B. M. Fitzgerald and Dr. K. Wodzicki for helpful comments.

REFERENCES

- EDGAR, A. T., 1962: Welcome Swallows in Northland. *Notornis*, 9: 293-294.
 HANKINS, B. D., 1963: Welcome Swallows nesting in Hawkes Bay. *Notornis*, 10: 234.
 MICHIE, R. H., 1959: Welcome Swallows nesting in Northland — a new breeding bird for New Zealand. *Notornis*, 8: 61-62.
 ROSS, M., 1962: Flocking of Welcome Swallows near Kaikohe. *Notornis*, 10: 90-91.
 SKEGG, P. D. G., 1962: A check on Welcome Swallows in northern Northland. *Notornis*, 10: 88-90.



SHORT NOTES

FLEDGING OF SILVEREYES

On 9/2/65, restlessness was observed in the two nestlings in the nest of Silvereyes (*Zosterops lateralis*) situated in the tip of the lowest pendent branch of a melaleuca tree, a few feet from the window of my home. Accordingly I watched the nest next morning, and at 6.55 a.m. one young bird was noted to be very active, and occasionally moving on to the rim of the nest. At 7 a.m. it moved 6 ins. from the nest, and began preening, scratching, and wing-stretching. Two minutes later the second followed on to a twig close by. Preening went on until 7.35 a.m., except for brief intervals when both fledglings sat close together and rested. During most of this time, one parent bird sat in the empty nest, or occasionally on the edge of it, watching the young birds; and the other parent brought food once and probably fed one of them, but I could not be sure. At 7.35 a.m. the first bird to leave the nest moved a few feet up the almost vertical branch, and flew without hesitation about 15 ft. into a nearby mahoe tree. Within 30 secs. it was followed by the other young bird. Close and sustained interest in the proceeding was seemingly taken by some House Sparrows, and also briefly by a Fantail.

— A. BLACKBURN