

## IS THE SOUTH ISLAND PIOPIO EXTINCT?

In view of the implied rarity of the South Island Piopio (*Turnagra c. capensis*) in recent references, the following rather sketchy glimpse may be of interest. On 24/5/63, while on a tramping trip, I caught a brief view of a totally strange bird in the heavy bush at the lower end of Lake Wilmot (Pyke Valley, West Otago). It was raining lightly at the time and identification was very unsatisfactory, but the bird was certainly about the size of the common Song Thrush, brownish above, and (what struck me most) with markedly yellowish underparts and flanks. It was perched momentarily on a beech branch about ten feet up, and then flew off into the dark forest. On consulting the literature I came to the conclusion that it could only have been the Piopio.

— PETER CHILD



## AN INATTENTIVE BLACKBIRD

"Attentiveness" is the term used to refer to the time a bird spends on the nest, and for different species this ranges from less than 50 to 100 per cent. of the total incubation period (van Tyne and Berger in "Fundamentals of Ornithology," p. 295). The hen Blackbird is commonly regarded as being a most attentive bird, and during incubation is seldom observed off the nest, except during brief periods for feeding. Therefore the following observations showing inattentiveness as a marked individual characteristic in a hen Blackbird (*T. merula*) may be of interest.

This bird had its nest in a grape-vine close to the back door of my home, and on the morning of 22/10/64 laid the last of its clutch of three eggs. I was absent until the evening of 28/10/64, and at 6 a.m. on the following day the bird was on the nest. At 1 p.m. the nest appeared deserted, and an examination of the eggs showed that they were stone cold. I naturally attributed the desertion to the sudden increase of human activity in the vicinity of the nest. However, at 4 p.m. she was sitting again, and was still there next morning. By 1 p.m. the nest had again been vacated for some time, and the eggs were once more completely cold. By 3 p.m. she was back on the nest.

This pattern continued. Each day between noon and 1 p.m. the eggs would be found quite cold, and between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. the bird would be back on the nest, until at 2 p.m. on 5/11/64 the first egg hatched, followed by another at 5 p.m., and the third some time after nightfall.

The subsequent history of this nest shows that the young disappeared at intervals without trace, the first on 13/11/64, the next on 20/11/64, and the last on 22/11/64.

Attentiveness is probably of high selective value to the species, for the risk of predation, already high, would be increased greatly by long periods of absence. The young appeared to me particularly vigorous and healthy on hatching, so that the hen's inattentiveness did not cause any lack of vitality; and the eggs hatched in  $13\frac{1}{2}$  days, the normal period for Blackbirds' eggs being 13 to 14 days. But her lack of attention during brooding was certainly carried on to the nestling stage, for there were long periods when no food was taken to the nest. The young did not prosper, and so paid the penalty for the parent's being a variant from type. At no time subsequent to laying was a male bird seen in the vicinity of the nest.

— A. BLACKBURN