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SHORT NOTE

STRONG HOMING INSTINCT IN A SPOTLESS CRAKE

Near Pirongia, in the Te Awamutu district there are several swamps which contain Spotless Crakes (*P. tabuensis*). One of these birds was caught and killed by a cat on a farm two miles south of Pirongia. This led to further inquiries being made and it was found that this small shy rail was quite common in a swamp on Mr. H. R. de Thierry's property. However, this swamp was shortly to be burned and cleared.

In order to try to save some of these birds from almost certain destruction, it was decided to catch as many of them as possible, band them, and then release them in a suitable swamp near the Hamilton Junior Naturalists' Club Lodge at Oparau. With the aid of a party from the Club, mist-nets were set up across the swamp and the vegetation systematically beaten towards the nets. Two birds were caught and, after banding, released. They were in excellent condition; and after being in captivity for only five hours, they immediately disappeared into cover. The date of this operation was 5/12/64.

On 22/1/65, about six weeks later, Mr. D. V. Merton, Wildlife Officer, Auckland, assisted with another netting operation in Mr. de Thierry's swamp. This time only one bird was captured; and to the amazement of all it was found to be banded and to be one of two birds previously caught. By the shortest route, it had travelled at least 15 miles from the point of release back to precisely the same spot where it was first captured and now had been recaptured.

Reports of the Spotless Crake in previous issues of *Notornis* indicated that the bird was a weak flier, as flights were of short duration before the bird dropped into cover. Oliver quotes R. S. Bell as having seen a longest flight of nine and a half yards. Buddle records a flight of twenty yards.

It is hard to imagine that this bird would have managed to return in such a short time across country abounding in various predators, and including in the terrain the bush covered range of Mt. Pirongia, unless capable of sustained flight. Perhaps this species flies more during night time.

When the bird was released on the second occasion it flew and glided about seventy yards, down into a valley. When last sighted it was still flying strongly.

— JOHN KENDRICK