

CANTERBURY MUSEUM EXPEDITION TO DUSKY SOUND (1965)

By Dr. JOHN HALL-JONES

For nearly six weeks of March and April, 1965, a Canterbury Museum expedition was based on Cascade Cove in Dusky Sound. Thanks to Mr. A. Picard's jet boat and Dr. M. Robertson's outboard, many parts of Dusky Sound, the Acheron Passage and Wet Jacket Arm were visited. The party experienced surprisingly fine weather and was able to make a number of camping trips in the Seaforth River region. Although one was able to gain a general impression of the birdlife on the water and in the bush, only two or three days were spent above the bushline. As there have obviously been great changes in the avifauna of the area since the days of Captain Cook, it may be of interest to compare our findings with the ornithological history of the area.

On his second voyage in 1773, Cook spent nearly two months in Dusky Sound. During this time he shot many duck and he describes five different types — the "painted" (paradise) duck, the grey duck and the "whistling" (blue) duck; also the black and the grey teal. Although the first four species were observed, no Grey Teal were seen. He also records the Woodhen, "which eat very well in a pye or fricassee," "the orange wattle bird," the "poy bird" "the flesh is most delicious") and the Fantail. Five geese from the Cape of Good Hope were left at Goose Cove but eighteen years later Captain Vancouver returned to find that they had all disappeared. This is not surprising as Henry describes the Wekas as "outrageous egg eaters."

Cook's great work was, of course, his excellent chart of Dusky Sound and his naming reflects his interest in the birdlife of the region.

In 1884 Andreas Reischek landed at Docherty's hut, opposite Cooper Island, and remained in the vicinity for the next six months. During this time he studied the Kakapo and amongst the introduced birds he recorded the Blackbird, Song-thrush, Goldfinch, Skylark and Greenfinch. None of these species was seen by our party. The rats which he found in such great numbers were apparently on the decrease in Henry's day and, although we camped for a night on the site of Docherty's hut, no rats were seen. Back at Cascade Cove a large portion of cheese remained intact on the beach and no rodents visited the store tent.

In 1894, Richard Henry was appointed caretaker of Resolution Island. The remains of his house on Pigeon Island were located and it was appropriate that a White Heron was seen at this delightful haven. Henry trapped a large number of Kiwi, Roa and Kakapo and transferred them to Resolution and other islands in the Sound. However, in 1900, he saw his first stoat on Resolution Island. Although several of his areas for trapping Kakapo were visited, no signs of this species were found and no drumming was heard. It is also interesting to note that only one stoat was seen during our stay in the area. Originally he saw Native Crows, Saddlebacks, Native Thrushes and Robins but, as the years went by, they disappeared. None of these species was seen



IV — Richard Henry on Pigeon Island

by our party and, although a special watch was kept, no Tuīs were recorded. Like Reischek, Henry saw the Blackbird, Song-thrush, Goldfinch and Skylark, but he found no Greenfinch. He also recorded the House Sparrow, Starling and Black Swan. Of these introduced birds, only the Black Swan and two Dunnock were seen in 1965.

Finally, after fourteen years at Dusky Sound, Henry departed for his new appointment as conservator at Kapiti Island. Fortunately, the work of this observant and resourceful man has been recorded in his annual reports to parliament and his paper on the habits of the flightless birds of New Zealand is a classic of its kind.

In recent years, Mr. K. Sutherland has devoted much time to the study of birdlife in Fiordland and we were delighted to find his name on a rock near our Cascade camp.

The party's leader, Mr. N. Duckworth, felt that Lake Mike was the most likely area for any *Megalapteryx* that may possibly be surviving. Unfortunately, his attempt to reach this area was thwarted by bad weather and bluffs. However, this was compensated for by the unearthing of two portions of the left tibio-tarsus of *Euryapteryx gravis* (Owen) from a Maori midden on Long Island. Mentioned in Henry's reports, the midden was rediscovered by Mr. A. Picard and is located at the foot of a high cliff at the west end of the island. On a preliminary examination by Dr. R. Duff and Mr. R. Scarlett, the bones include those of the Weka, Kaka, Crested and Blue Penguins. Dr. Duff points out that this is the first association of *Euryapteryx* with man in Fiordland and that the bones may have been carried from the eastern plains as raw material for the manufacture of tools.

NOTES ON THE SPECIES

I am indebted to Messrs. A. Picard (A.P.) and R. Cavaney (R.C.) who have added their own observations to these notes. Henry noted fluctuations in the bird populations of Dusky Sound and the fact that certain species were not seen during this six weeks' visit does not, of course, exclude them from the area.

SOUTH ISLAND KIWI: Although kiwis were heard on a number of occasions, none was actually seen and it can only be assumed that the species concerned was *australis*. Bill marks were frequently seen.

PENGUINS: Two small penguins were seen "porpoising" in Cascade Cove. Although they were thought to have been a pair of Blue Penguins, they may have been Crested Penguins.

SHAGS: Shags were common and were distributed throughout the Sound. Black (*P. carbo*), Pied (*P. varius*) and White-throated (*P. brevirostris*) shags were seen.

DUCKS: Flocks of seventy were counted in Cormorant Cove and at the mouth of the Seaforth River. Although these were mainly Grey Duck, a few Mallard Duck were identified (A.P.). A flock of twenty Paradise Duck was seen at the mouth of the Seaforth River and elsewhere small numbers were seen. On inland streams three Blue Duck were seen. Six New Zealand Scaup were seen near Nine Fathoms Passage (A.P.).

BLACK SWAN: Twelve were seen at Goose Cove and a few single birds were observed elsewhere.

WHITE-FRONTED TERN: Colonies were seen at Cascade Cove, Duck Cove and at the mouth of the Seaforth River.

BLACK-BILLED GULL: Seen in large numbers and were very much more common than the Red-billed Gull of which only a few were observed.

BLACK-BACKED GULL: Seen in small numbers throughout the Sound.

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER: A flock of twelve was seen near Indian Island and eight more were counted in the Sound.

SOUTH ISLAND WEKA: Only a few were seen and it was disappointing to find none at Wood-hen Cove (A.P.).

KERERU: A flock of twelve was observed near the Seaforth River and it was delightful to find two on Pigeon Island. Others were seen on occasions.

MOREPORK: Heard occasionally at night.

GREEN KAKA: Two seen (R.C.).

KEA: Twelve were counted in a valley near the Seaforth River.

KAKAPO: Ideal caves were found above the bushline but these contained only Kea feathers. No pellets, scratching holes or tracks were seen and it was noted that deer were common in this particular valley.

KINGFISHER: Two recorded.

YELLOW-BREASTED TIT: Widely distributed throughout the Sound and one of the commonest birds.

FANTAILS: Very common throughout the Sound. The great majority were pied but six black fantails were counted. One of the latter had white cheeks.

GREY WARBLER: Quite often seen or heard.

BROWN CREEPER: Three were seen near the tent at 1,500 feet.

BELLBIRD: Were very common throughout the area. Some were noticeably dark in colour.

PIPIT: Surprisingly enough only one bird was seen. This was on our last day at Cascade Cove.

RIFLEMAN: Three seen near the Seaforth River.

DUNNOCK: Two seen near Astronomer Point.

HERONS: Appropriately, the only White Heron (*Egretta alba*) seen was near the remains of Henry's cottage on Pigeon Island. A few White-faced Heron were recorded and a Reef Heron may have been seen on Heron Island.

SOOTY SHEARWATER: At least a hundred were counted outside Five Fingers Point in the Tasman Sea.

BULLER'S MOLLYMAWK: A few seen near the entrance to the Sound. Other petrels were observed but their identification was uncertain.

CAPE PIGEON: Homeward bound, one was seen near Chalky Inlet.

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