

BIRDS OF THE HEAPHY RIVER AREA

By R. J. SCARLETT, Canterbury Museum

The following list of birds observed on various trips to the Heaphy River area in 1959-1963 will supplement the paper by David Dawson, *Notornis* 11, pp. 127-129, 1964.

In all, seven trips, led by Owen Wilkes and myself, and covering the months of May, July, August, September, November and early December, were made, for caving, collecting sub-fossil bird bones, and archaeological purposes. On one of them, in November, 1961, four of us went right through the Heaphy Track, spending over two weeks on the way, mostly on archaeological work near the Heaphy River mouth, and caving at Goulund Downs.

The list gives the months in which the birds were seen, usually by both Owen and myself, and often by other members of the parties, but there were a few occasions on which only one of us saw a particular species. Unless otherwise stated, the list concerns the area within a few miles of the Heaphy Hut. In the Goulund Downs area Owen and I were mostly inside caves, the others having left us to continue the journey; and when we left we were too weighted down with moa bones, clambering around or through wind-fallen trees across the track, and, in my case, coping with blistered feet, to have time for bird observations on the last 18 miles to Brown's Hut.

KIWI (*Apteryx* sp.): Heard, both male and female, at night only.

One calling intermittently most of the night at the Lewis Hut 19-20/11/61. Mr. J. Lowe, of Karamea, who knows the area well, informed us in 1963 that he has seen both the Great Spotted Kiwi (*Apteryx haasti*), and the South Island Kiwi (*Apteryx a. australis*), within the area. I do not know if the calls of the two species can be distinguished. Heard May, July, August, September, November, early December.

BLUE PENGUIN: Not seen by us, but locally reported as occasionally seen at the mouth of the Kohaihai River, where the Heaphy-Bainham track begins. Found sub-fossil in a cave and in the Moa-hunter deposits, so the report is credible.

GANNET: Seen on several occasions diving into the sea off the Heaphy River mouth, in July.

BLACK SHAG: A small colony up the river from the Heaphy Hut. Not as plentiful as the Pied Shag. July, August, November.

PIED SHAG: A colony a few hundred yards up the river from the Heaphy Hut. Common, often seen flying towards the bar, feeding on the river, or swimming, and occasionally seen also between the Kohaihai and Heaphy rivers. May, July, August, September, November, early December.

HERON: Probably the White-faced Heron, but it was seen on one occasion only, across the river and too far away for certain identification without binoculars. July. Two more were seen by Owen Wilkes at dusk at the river mouth: September 1963.

GREY DUCK: Mainly on the lagoon which lies behind the sandhills to the south of the Heaphy River mouth. July.

PARADISE DUCK: One was seen on the river, between the Gunner Creek and the Lewis Hut. November.

BLUE DUCK: Mainly seen on the lagoon. July, August, September, November. Also one between Kohaihai and Heaphy (seen by Maurice Sinclair, September 1963).

HARRIER: May.

N.Z. FALCON: May, July.

SOUTH ISLAND WEKA: The two or three at the Heaphy Hut, unlike all other wekas I have known, seemed shy, and rarely appeared before dusk. One was seen on the morning of 20/11/61 at the Lewis Hut, and there were two at the Goulard Downs Hut in November 1961. At Heaphy, May, July, August, September, November.

PUKEKO: May.

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER: The repeated trips, affording thirteen opportunities for me to observe them, revealed that there were pairs established at the Kohaihai and Heaphy River mouths, and three pairs in the twelve miles of coast between the two rivers, a total of five pairs. In the early 1930's I saw a pair just north of the Kohaihai Bluff, but did not see any others on what was my first trip to the Heaphy River. May, July, August, September, November, early December.

BANDED DOTTEREL: A pair was frequently seen at the mouth of the Heaphy River, mainly on the sand. No nest was found in the very limited time available for searching. August, November, December.

BLACK-BACKED GULL: Appeared intermittently, usually appearing as one or two flying above the river near its mouth. May, July, August, November, early December.

CASPIAN TERN: Off the river mouth. July.

N.Z. PIGEON: Not plentiful. July, August, November, December.

SOUTH ISLAND KAKA: Beyond the Lewis Hut, and beyond the Goulard Downs. November 1961.

KEA: Plentiful at Goulard Downs, observed in two places between the Heaphy and Lewis Huts. Sometimes flew down over the Heaphy Hut, calling, and making an unholy row on the tin roof about daybreak. Some of them very "cheeky." May, August, November, early December.

SHINING CUCKOO: Six or seven individuals seen. November, early December.

MOREPORK: At least two in the vicinity of the Heaphy Hut. One individual came to within a few feet of me after dusk, and held a "conversation," answering my imitations of its call. May, August, November, December.

S.I. RIFLEMAN: May.

S.I. FANTAIL: Both black and pied forms, the latter more plentiful. There were usually 3 or 4 individuals around the "dig," after the insects we disturbed. I wish they ate sandflies! May, July, August, September, November, early December.

YELLOW-BREASTED TIT: May, July, November, December.

S.I. ROBIN: One was seen at the "Bivvy," above the rise from the Lewis Hut. November 1961. One was seen by Don Miller between Kohaihai and the Heaphy in May 1962.

S.I. FERNBIRD: Goulard Downs: Heard far more often than seen, as most of our time was spent in caves. November 1961.

GREY WARBLER: May, July, August, November, early December.

PIBIT: Mainly seen on the sandy river beach of the Heaphy below our "dig," between there and the mouth of the river. July, August, September.

BELLBIRD: May, August, September, November, early December.

TUI: May, July, November, early December.

SILVEREYE: November, December.

A total of 30 species seen or (Kiwi) heard, one (Penguin) reported.

Introduced Birds

BLACK SWAN: Five flew over the river, near the mouth: September.

ROCK PIGEON: A banded (? racing) bird died apparently of exhaustion, at the Heaphy Hut, in November 1961.

SONG THRUSH: September.

BLACKBIRD: November, December.

GOLDFINCH: July, August.

A list of the sub-fossil birds from the area is included in a report on the archaeological work, to be published in the *Records of the Canterbury Museum*.



SHORT NOTES

PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVERS AT LAKE REREWHAKAITU

While motoring past the southern side of Lake Rerewhakaaitu, on 4/12/66, I spotted several large ducks walking near the lakeside. When I examined them through my glasses I saw they were Paradise Ducks (*Tadorna variegata*) — 8 dark-headed birds and one duck. Also dotted along the lakeside were numerous Pied Stilts (*Himantopus leucocephalus*) and a strange wader running about in the grass. I soon discovered that there were other similar birds nearby, either feeding or standing about. Presently one of these flew along the lake nearer to me and, thanks to the excellent light, I was able to examine it clearly through my telescope. At once I saw it was a Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*), its golden back, greyish throat and breast, pale eyebrow, black bill and grey feet showed very clearly. It rose again, flying off with a rapid zig-zag flight showing no marking above, and a dull white underneath as it banked.

I counted thirteen of these plovers and saw another smaller wader nearby which I suspect was a Banded Dotterel (*Charadrius bicinctus*), but was unable to get another sight of it so cannot be sure at all. Later as I drove on I saw yet more Golden Plovers standing about in the grass at the lakeside so that there must have been at the very least some 25 birds, as some would have been obscured by vegetation.

— R. W. JACKSON

[Golden Plovers have rarely been found far inland in New Zealand. This report is therefore all the more interesting. In 1962 one was photographed by P. McD. McLean on a pool with ducks and Pied Stilts at Piopio.—Ed.]