

AVIAN REMAINS FROM NEW CAVES IN THE TAUMATAMAIRE DISTRICT

By DAVID G. MEDWAY

Since the formation of the Taranaki Caving Club in 1964, members have discovered and explored a number of limestone caves in the area between Awakino and Mahoenui to the west of the New Plymouth - Te Kuiti state highway. The majority of the known caves are to be found near the Taumatamaire Road in hilly country, now largely cleared of its original bush cover, some five miles from the west coast.

In the course of these explorations a number of sub-fossil avian remains have been found. These remains are of interest for they give an idea of some of the bird-life of the area as it was in years gone by. Of the species so far recovered the Cave Rail (*Capellirallus karamu*), North Island Notornis (*Notornis mantelli mantelli*) and Little Extinct Woodhen (*Gallirallus minor*) are extinct and the Little Spotted Kiwi (*Apteryx oweni*) is extinct in the North Island; the Kakapo (*Strigops habroptilus*) is probably extinct in the North Island; the Black Petrel (*Procellaria parkinsoni*), Blue Duck (*Hymenolaimus malacorrhynchos*) and North Island Weka (*Gallirallus australis greyi*) have not, so far as is known, been recorded live from this locality; the New Zealand Pigeon (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) and Tui (*Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*) are still present and no doubt the North Island Kiwi (*Apteryx australis mantelli*) is to be found in the extensive forest to the immediate west and north. The North Island Kokako (*Callaeas cinerea wilsoni*) still occurs in parts of that forest: Macdonald 1966 (Notornis 13, 2: 102).

This note mentions the species (except Moas) recovered between June 1964 and June 1967. Moa remains have been found in most caves in the area. While the majority of these are as yet unidentified, *Dinornis giganteus*, *Dinornis novaeseelandiae*, and *Eurapteryx geranoides* (among others) appear to be represented. As would be expected, the majority of the specimens so far recovered (86%) are referable to flightless species and of these the Kakapo and Cave Rail are numerically predominant.

SPECIES RECOVERED

Strigops habroptilus: Eleven Kakapos are represented mainly by leg-bones found principally in Robbers Hole and Aussie Cave. The number of remains recovered would appear to indicate that the Kakapo was common in former years in the area in question.

Capellirallus karamu: The recovery from Robbers Hole and Skyline cave of bones attributable to ten specimens of the Cave Rail would seem to indicate that this extinct rail, like the Kakapo, was formerly common in the area.

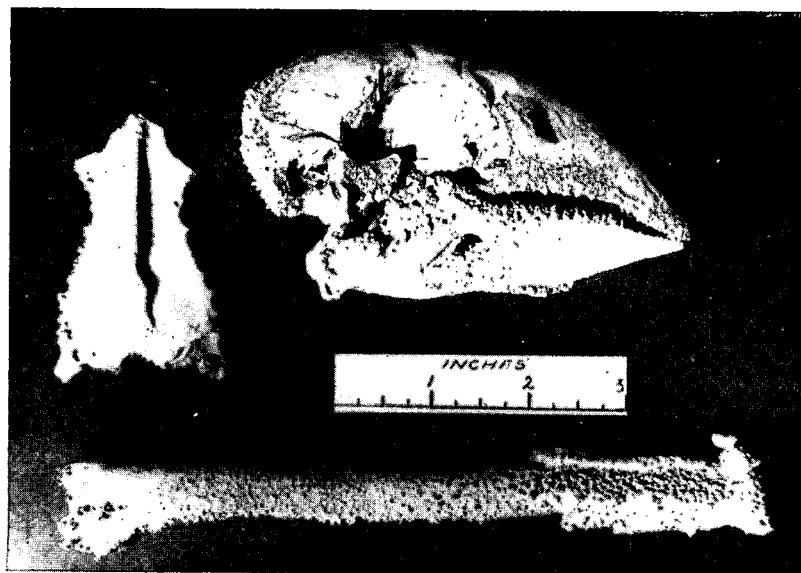
Apteryx australis mantelli: A total of six North Island Kiwis are represented by bones found in Robbers Hole, Skyline and Swiss Cheese.

Apteryx oweni: Leg-bones of two Little Spotted Kiwis were recovered from Robbers Hole on 8/1/1966.



[W. J. Guild

Plate XXVI — **Capellirallus karamu** skeleton in situ. Skyline cave, 26/9/1965.



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Plate XXVII — Skull, sternum and tibia of **Notornis m. mantelli** from Porthole cave, July 1965.

Gallirallus australis greyi: Four North Island Wekas are represented by bones found in Robbers Hole and Skyline.

Notornis mantelli mantelli: In 1960 when G. R. Williams published his paper on the Takahe (Williams 1960, Trans. Roy. Soc. N.Z., 88: 235-258), the North Island sub-species was not known to have formerly occurred on the western side of the North Island north of the Waingangoro River in South Taranaki. The recovery of one skeleton from Porthole Cave in July 1965 and of another from Swiss Cheese on 14/11/1965 constitutes a valuable addition to our knowledge of the former distribution of the Notornis in the North Island.

Gallirallus minor: An almost perfect skeleton found in Swiss Cheese on 21/11/1965 and a left caracoid found in Skyline cave on 20/2/1966 form a valuable record of the former occurrence of the Little Extinct Woodhen in the area.

Procellaria parkinsoni: A worn left humerus attributable to the Black Petrel was found in Skyline cave on 15/5/1966.

Hymenolaimus malacorhynchus: One part left humerus referable to the Blue Duck was found in Robbers Hole on 12/6/1966.

Hemiphaga n. novaeseelandiae: A part-skeleton of a New Zealand Pigeon was found in Robbers Hole on 8/1/1966.

Eurystomus sp.?: One part-skeleton (sub-adult) found in Skyline cave on 20/2/1966 has been tentatively identified as being of this genus. The Broad-billed Roller (*Eurystomus orientalis pacificus*) is an occasional straggler to New Zealand.

Prothemadera n. novaeseelandiae: Bones of a Tui were found in Swiss Cheese on 14/11/1965.

Callaeas cinerea wilsoni: One part right tibio-tarsus of a North Island Kokako was recovered from Robbers Hole in September 1964.

I am grateful to Mr. R. J. Scarlett for identifying the bones recovered and to Mr. W. J. Gould of the Taranaki Caving Club for the photographs which illustrate this note. The majority of the bones recovered have been deposited in the Canterbury Museum.



SHORT NOTES

STATUS OF AUSTRALIAN COOT NEAR ROTORUA

Although there are some 75 or more Coots (*F. atra*) on Lake Okaraka at present, there appear to have been no successful broods reared during the 1966/67 breeding season. Mr. and Mrs. W. Broun, who live beside the lake, have kept a very close watch on the birds. Although they saw the birds pairing and choosing territories they could find no nests with eggs. Obviously it is very difficult to ascertain the reason for the non-breeding, but perhaps the lowering of the lake could be the chief cause.

On 10/6/67, while driving past Okere with H. Lyall, I spotted a Coot just off the landing stage for the launch which tours round Lake Rotoiti. We both took a second look and confirmed that it was indeed a Coot. There appeared to be no other Coots about.

— R. JACKSON