

## SHORT NOTES

### INLAND NESTING OF RED-BILLED GULLS IN NORTHLAND

The township of Kohukohu lies at the inland extremity of the Hokianga Harbour, where it branches into the Waihou and Mangamuka Rivers. On 12/12/65 a small colony of Red-billed Gulls (*L. scopulinus*) was discovered at Kohukohu; three nests on the abandoned Kohukohu jetty and fourteen nests on the abandoned jetty at Mill Wharf, about 1½ miles from Kohukohu township. The nesting season was well advanced; one nest at Kohukohu jetty held two eggs, and at Mill Wharf each of three nests contained one downy chick, and each of two a feathered chick being fed by parents. Another feathered, non-flying chick, was swimming with parents in attendance.

In 1966 I visited the Mill Wharf colony on five occasions during the period October/December. On October 8th 23 birds were present and two were seen carrying straw. By 30th October 21 nests were finished or partly built, and from the shore five of these were seen to contain eggs. On 5th November we swam out, climbed the piles, and inspected 21 nests, of which 8 contained one egg, 10 two eggs and three three eggs. Hatching had started by 12th November and the parents were very aggressive. By 10th December there were still chicks in twelve of the original nests, and four additional late nests contained respectively one egg, two eggs, two eggs, and one egg one chick. The total Mill Wharf nesting population of gulls was therefore 25 pairs in the 1966 season.

Three pairs laid their eggs in hollows on top of a rotted girder, without any nest lining. Other nests on piles and girders were constructed of straw, small twigs and straw, or small twigs without any straw. One of the late nests was made of straw and dry seaweed, another of small twigs and seaweed. Two nests were right on top of the piles; many of the girders have fallen off or been removed, and the small shelf left is a favoured nest site. All the nests were at least three feet above the water at high tide.

A White-fronted Tern (*S. striata*) which was building a straw nest on top of a pile on 30th October, had laid one egg by 5th November. On 12th November the tern's egg had gone and there was a Red-billed Gull's egg in the nest. On 10th December, when the main gull nesting was nearly over, five pairs of terns were on nests, three of which were on piles and unlined. Two birds were sitting on disused gull nests, to which some additional material appeared to have been added when they were taken over by the terns.

— R. S. COWAN



### UNUSUAL NESTINGS OF NEW ZEALAND DOTTEREL

In the 1965/66 season two pairs of New Zealand Dotterel (*C. obscurus*) nested about 300 yards apart on sandbanks on the sea-front of Mr. C. F. Duder's farm at North Road, Clevedon. On 23/11/65, No. 1 pair had three small young. Of these one was banded on 6/12/65 and another on 30/12/65. The third one was not banded.

On 6/12/65 No. 2 pair had four eggs in nest. On visiting the nest on 4/1/66 I found that an unknown person had placed three small stakes round the nest and two eggs had gone. These were later deserted and found to be bad.

In the 1966/67 season two pairs again nested, about 250 yards apart.

On 28/9/66 No. 1 pair had nest, two eggs; 30th, two eggs; 10/10/66, one small chick about 100 yards away across a very small tidal creek containing water only at high tide; 11/10/66, chick found dead. On 21/11/66, this pair had another nest with one egg, birds showing very little interest; 23/11/66, still one egg, deserted.

On 28/9/66 No. 2 pair, also with two eggs, about 270 yards from No. 1 pair's nest; 10/10/66, four eggs; 14th, five eggs; 24th, five eggs, bird sitting; 7/11/66 and 9th, and 12th, five eggs, bird sitting each time. On 15/11/66 the nest had been washed out by a high tide. The eggs had been scattered and two were not found. One was in tide wrack. The other two were at high water mark about four feet apart and five feet from the nest site. New nests had been made for each of these eggs where the tide had left them and the bird was sitting on one which was warm.

It being long past a possible hatching date, I took home the cold egg and the washed out one. Both were addled. The third egg was later found to be addled also, and the birds had left the vicinity.

In each case No. 1 pair's record has been shown, as it indicates that the four and five-egg nests were not the result of two birds laying in one nest. There were no other than the two pairs present in either year. It could be that the No. 2 pair was responsible for both the four egg and the five egg clutches. The only other four-egg nest of which I have knowledge was found by J. L. Kendrick and party at or near Ruapuke, south of Raglan. I have not heard of a previous five egg clutch.

— (Mrs.) M. E. McKENZIE

[Five egg clutches are certainly rare; but at Mangawhai on 20/12/39 C. A. Fleming and I saw a nest containing five eggs which we noted were "all of the same type and did not look like the product of two hens." — Ed.]



### STRONG HOMING INSTINCT IN A PUKEKO

Mr. J. Mackintosh has recently been capturing Pukekos (*Porphyrio melanotus*) which cause some trouble around his Grey Partridge pens at the Southland Acclimatisation Society's Game Farm; and after banding they are transported to far-away places. Two captured Pukekos were taken to Tautuku, which is towards the coast from Balclutha and some 60 miles in a direct line from the point of capture. Eight days later one of these birds was retrapped back at the Game Farm. Mr. Mackintosh checked and rechecked his banding records before he was satisfied it was one of the same birds. There have been some similar instances of Pukekos homing in the past, but over much shorter distances; and this is by far the most surprising yet recorded.

Recently (1966), two other instances of the strength of the homing instinct in New Zealand rails have been described. One concerned a Spotless Crake (*Porzana tabuensis*) as reported by Kendrick (Notornis 13, 11) and the other a young Weka (*Gallirallus greyi*) which tramped 80 miles home (Notornis 13, 64).

— R. R. SUTTON