SOME NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF NORFOLK ISLAND

By HARRY WAKELIN

Norfolk Island lies about 460 miles N.N.W. of North Cape, and is roughly 5 miles long by 3 miles wide. It has about 90 miles of roads, of which the greater proportion are earth. There are about 1,000 inhabitants who are largely descended from the Bounty mutineers, but nowadays intermingled with Australians, New Zealand and English settlers.

Access from the sea is by lighter to Kingston Pier to the South and Cascade Pier to the North and as these landings face the open sea, they are often unworkable, but most of the passenger trade and perishable foodstuffs come in by air.

The island is mostly of volcanic origin, but with dead coral out-cropping on the south-east corner and live coral reefs mostly to the south. These reefs enclose the only safe swimming beach, named Emily Bay.

Much of the island is upland plateau from which lead many steep and rugged valleys cutting seawards. On the plateau, towards the north-west, two volcanic peaks (Mt. Bates and Mt. Pitt) rise to a little over 1,000 feet.

Cliffs which average 200 to 300 feet in height surround most of the Island. There are not many places where one can reach the sea level easily. The only land near sea level is at Kingston where there are perhops 200 acres of flat land and swamp known as Kingston Common. It is here that one finds the ruins of the gaol and the old administration buildings (some still in use, while others are in ruins) from the notorious penal days of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. There is also the cemetery where one may get an insight into those turbulent times by reading the tombstones.

During the penal days the Island supported approximately 1,800 people — mostly off the land. Nowadays it relies almost entirely on the sale of postage stamps, taxation on liquor, and tourism for its income.

Because of its small size it is not very difficult to study the bird life. Seabirds are here in great profusion during the breeding season.

There are two offshore islands namely, Nepean Island — approximately half a mile offshore to the south east and Philip Island — approximately two miles away in the same direction. In contrast to Nepean Island which is formed almost entirely of dead coral raised about 50 feet out of the sea and is approximately level, Philip Island is volcanic with steep hills, high cliffs and rugged valleys and is very eroded, standing as a monument to the folly of the men who released rabbits there in the early days. It rises gaunt above the sea, but beautiful on account of the rich and varied earth colours.

To the north of Norfolk Island and close inshore, a number of spectacular rock formations formed entirely of basalt, weathered black, rise high and sheer out of a deep blue sea.

The Kingston Common is where one sees the migrating waders. These commonly frequent a marshy area through which Watermill Stream flows into the sea at Emily Bay.

The Mt. Pitt - Mt. Bates area is still largely covered by indigenous bush, which in many ways resembles New Zealand bush. There are some very thick groves of palms very closely akin to New Zealand Nikau, two varieties of Tree Ferns and quite a variety of ferns, a number of which occur in New Zealand. Everywhere the stately Norfolk Pines *(Araucaria heterophylla)* raise their heads above the bush, and indeed, dominate the whole island even to the cliff faces. This is their timber tree and it supports three sawmills. The sawn timber is rather like Kauri. Unfortunately many of these trees are dying and have very little remaining foliage, but are festooned with long beards of blue-grey lichen. The seeds, which are carried in spherical cones about 6 inches across, fall and germinate in profusion, but where the area is not enclosed, are soon demolished by cattle. Some Norfolk Pines are very large, although well past useful maturity. There is one tree 33 feet in circumference and another 31 feet. Both are still alive but hollow, and it is possible to climb inside at the base and find ample room to move about. Indeed, one such tree (since destroyed) is said to have housed an escaped convict named Barney Duffey for seven years during the penal era. Another tree is 27 feet in circumference and lies at an angle of approximately 45 degrees from the perpendicular.

Another common tree which grows to considerable proportions is the native hibiscus *(Lagunaria patersoni)*, known locally as White Oak. In the spring these trees are covered profusely with lovely pink blossoms. They also grow around the cliff faces where they form a low wind-swept scrub conforming to the shape of the cliffs. The cattle are very fond of these trees and consequently there seems to be little regeneration. Their numbers were greatly reduced in the early days as the wood was used for burning lime which was not discoloured by the white ash.

There are two varieties of a small tree similar to New Zealand Ake Ake, known locally as Tea Tree, one of which has a profusion of red flowers in the late spring, which make it very conspicuous in the bush.

When Captain Cook discovered Norfolk Island in 1774 he found it to be uninhabited and the earliest reports state that lush, dense bush everywhere reached the cliff tops. The cliffs were covered in flax and in the penal days Maoris were brought over from New Zealand to teach the convicts the art of dressing this for making canvas.

Beyond the bush, wherever the land has been cultivated, much of it has been colonised by Lantana and wild guavas. There are no native grasses, but now wherever there is grass, it is mostly Kikuyu, which, if left ungrazed, grows so tall that it is really hard work to scramble through it.

Following are the birds seen by the writer most of which have also been photographed during short visits to the Island in August 1963, November 1965, February 1967 and August 1967.

Also mentioned are visiting birds as noted over the years by

Mrs. Merval Hoare, a local naturalist, to whom I record my thanks for suuplying these few notes to supplement my own.

" During 1951-52, a white crane (*Egretta* sp.) frequented the swampy areas.

In December 1960, c. 30 birds identified as Pied Oystercatchers were seen probing for food on the air-strip. [A lost flock of *H. o. finschi ?* Ed.]

April 1961, a Red-billed Gull at Kingston.

Summer 1961, a Strawnecked Ibis with a damaged leg was often seen on Kingston Common (c.f. Notornis 10, 304).

29/8/63. Two Goldfinches at Duncombe Bay were the first I saw on the island.

12/4/64. Two gulls at Kingston.

21/3/65. A ' grey-backed ' gull at Slaughter Bay.

17/3/65. Four gulls at Emily Bay. These were very like the Red-billed Gull of New Zealand, except that the bills were black. Legs and feet were red." [Evidently immature Red-billed or Silver Gulls. Ed.]

SPECIES LIST

GIANT PETREL *(Macronectes giganteus)*

On 5/8/67 I saw 2 Giant Petrels feeding on garbage in the sea at Headstone rubbish tip. Their dark heads and the colour of their bills suggest that they were young birds possibly of South Atlantic origin.

WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER *(Puffinus pacificus)* (Known locally as Ghost Birds)

The top of Nepean Island is composed of rotted coral which has disintegrated into sand. This is riddled with the nesting holes of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and it is impossible to walk more than a few steps without putting one's foot through into their burrows.

They also nest along the cliff tops in many places on Norfolk Island and cause a great deal of erosion, which in turn makes them very unpopular with the islanders.

Because Norfolk Island is for the greater part volcanic, the top soil in many places is very fine and dusty and if it were not for the fact that Kikuyu grass grows there plentifully, the erosion would be much greater.

In November 1965, I found that the shearwaters were already coming ashore to claim their nesting burrows, and by going around at night with a torch we were able to find birds sitting around on the ground outside the burrows as well as inside. Under the ground they make a horrible wailing sound (hence the name Ghost Bird).

In February 1967 I expected to find young in the burrows, but was surprised to find still only eggs. They are white and about the size of hen eggs but very much more pointed and I understand they take seven weeks to hatch.

Many of these birds fall prey to cats or rats and many may be found with the breasts eaten out.

I believe that in the season they can be seen just on dusk on a clear evening approaching from the sea in a huge black cloud.

BLACK-WINGED PETREL *(Pterodroma nigripennis)*

In February 1967 I saw quite a number of these birds flying about the cliffs and doing all sorts of acrobatics. Their antics in the air are so carefree that they made me think of clowns in the air. In the Blackbank area I saw the remains of a number of them and presumed that they had been shot, but the next morning I found three which had obviously been dead for only a few hours on the ridge by Captain Cook's memorial. They showed no apparent sign of injury and I wondered whether they had hit the ridge while flying in the dark. I was unable to ascertain where they breed.

Plate XXI — Red-tailed Tropic Birds fighting over a nesting site, November 1965. [Harry Wakelin

RED-TAILED TROPICBIRD *(Phaethon rubricauda)*

These birds arrive every year to nest, mostly around the northern cliffs where the nesting sites are, for the most part, inaccessible.

I was fortunate to have found access to a few nesting sites about 100 feet down a cliff. I saw lots of birds flying round and from the top of the cliff they looked white and no larger than Red-billed Gulls, so, when I was able to see them closer I was surprised to find that they are about the size of a duck.

Having climbed down the cliff to where I had seen them coming in to land, the first close view I had was of two holding each other by the beaks, locked in combat, fighting over nesting sites. Both birds pulled and twisted until at last one gave in, and then, utterly exhausted, the other would settle on the nesting site only to be challenged later by another bird. This was in November, 1965.

On close inspection I found that they were not completely white, but were wearing nuptial plumage which shows a delicate pink blush through the feathers. The result is really quite subtle and beautiful. Some have a great deal of colour, often a salmon pink. The two red feathers in their tail are about the size of knitting needles and are very conspicuous, especially while they are in flight, because they change direction with each movement of the other tail feathers during manoeuvring. Their beaks are about 3 inches long, very strong, and a bright red.

The nesting sites I saw were on ledges in the cliffs that had been cut out by the weather, leaving partial cover arching above. The fighting which I had witnessed took place about mid-day. I went back at 6.30 a.m. one morning to find not a bird in sight so came to the conclusion this must be their fishing time. They feed on small squid about 4 inches long.

In February 1967 I returned to the same nesting area and found access to five nests. Fortunately, they were in different stages of breeding, from the egg (which is heavily speckled over a rusty coloured background), to fairly fully fledged young. They have only one young, and, like Gannets, sit very close.

They use no nesting material. By this time of the year most of them had lost their pink flush. Their feathers were beginning to look bedraggled and invariably they had only one red tail feather which gave me the impression that perhaps they moulted one and grew another before moulting the second one. The islanders used to pluck the red tail feathers out for hat decoration.

On one site were two parent birds with their young, while on another was one parent bird and another which was dead. On top of the dead one was a squid which gave me the impression that the live mate had brought it and offered it, thinking to revive its partner. It was fortunate for the rest of the family that I found it as it was already attracting blowflies, and I threw it over the cliff which must have been a relief to the rest of the family.

In contrast to the parents, the young have dark grey beaks which seem to merge with the eyes at the early stage. The little ones are covered in fluffy grey down. Later, as the wings develop, the down becomes whiter and the feathers on the wings have black edges, giving a rather pleasing mottled effect. The young, whose parents were away, tended to be dozing, while those whose parents were present, used them for sheltering and hiding behind.

BLUE-FACED BOOBY *(Sula dactylata)*

Nepean Island is also a favourite nesting ground for Blue-faced Boobies. Although about the same size as our Gannets, they are not nearly so handsome, as they lack the orange shade to the head. Their heads are white and the beak is an old ivory colour turning to blue at the base.

While our Gannets nest in tight colonies with about a square yard for each pair, the Boobies spread their nests well apart and have no close contact with each other.

In November 1965 they were at all stages of breeding from eggs to fully fledged young, so it would appear that perhaps they nest fairly continuously (they must at least be nesting in June).

In February 1967 I saw a pair with a fully fledged young which had been raised on the point at ' 100 acres ' on Norfolk Island itself, where there had been several nesting pairs that season.

WHITE-FACED HERON *(Ardea novaehollandiae)*

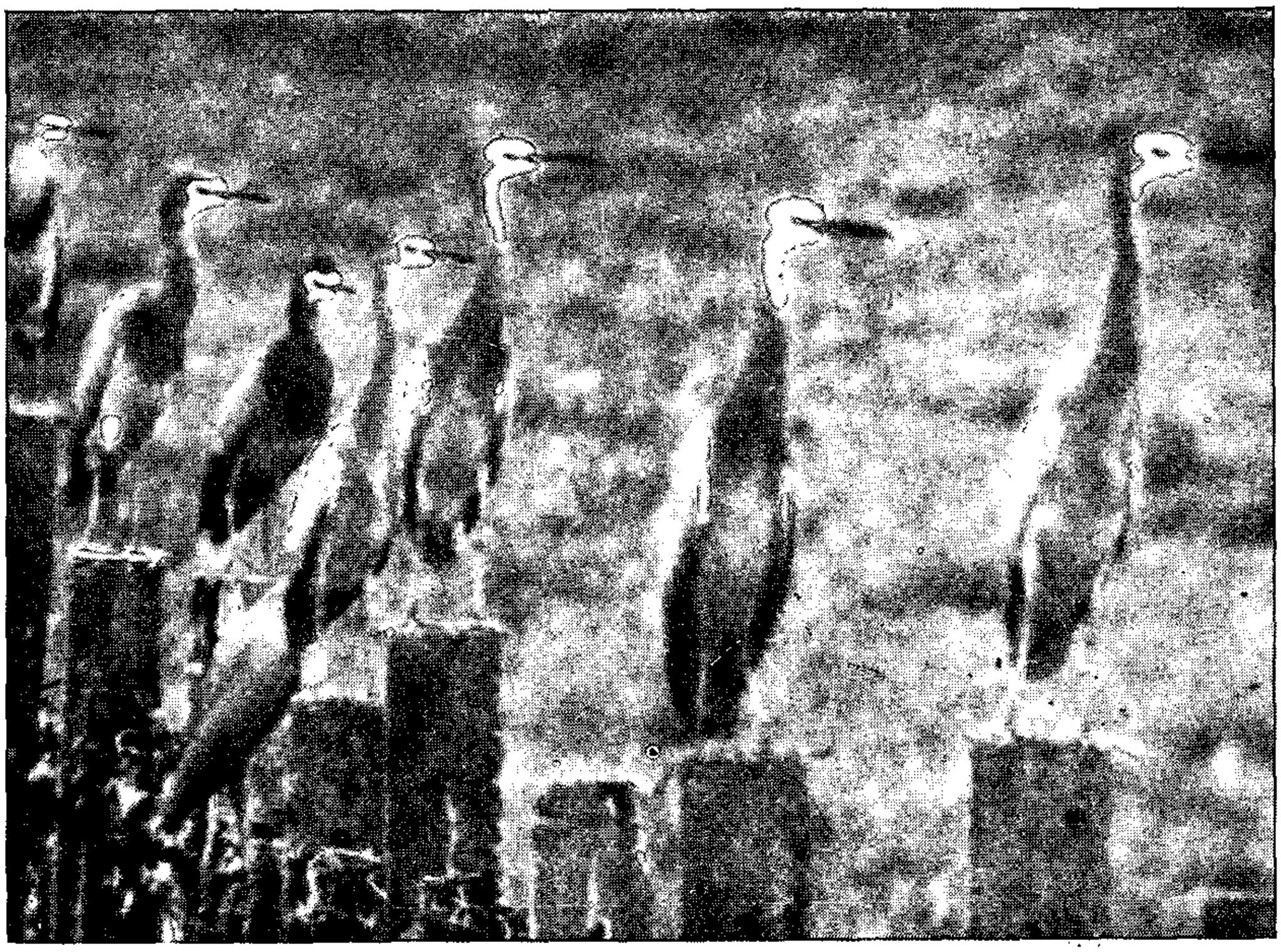
In August 1963, I noted one pair which spent their time in Watermill Creek when the tide was in and when out — on the coral reef at Cemetery Beach.

In November 1965, I saw possibly two pairs. There was very little water showing as a result of the nine-month drought.

In February 1967, I saw mostly only four. I noticed two on the cliff top at ' 100 acres.'

In August 1967, Kingston Common was flooded and I saw ten together on several occasion. I was able to photograph eight in a row sitting on fence posts.

These observations seem to show a marked increase.



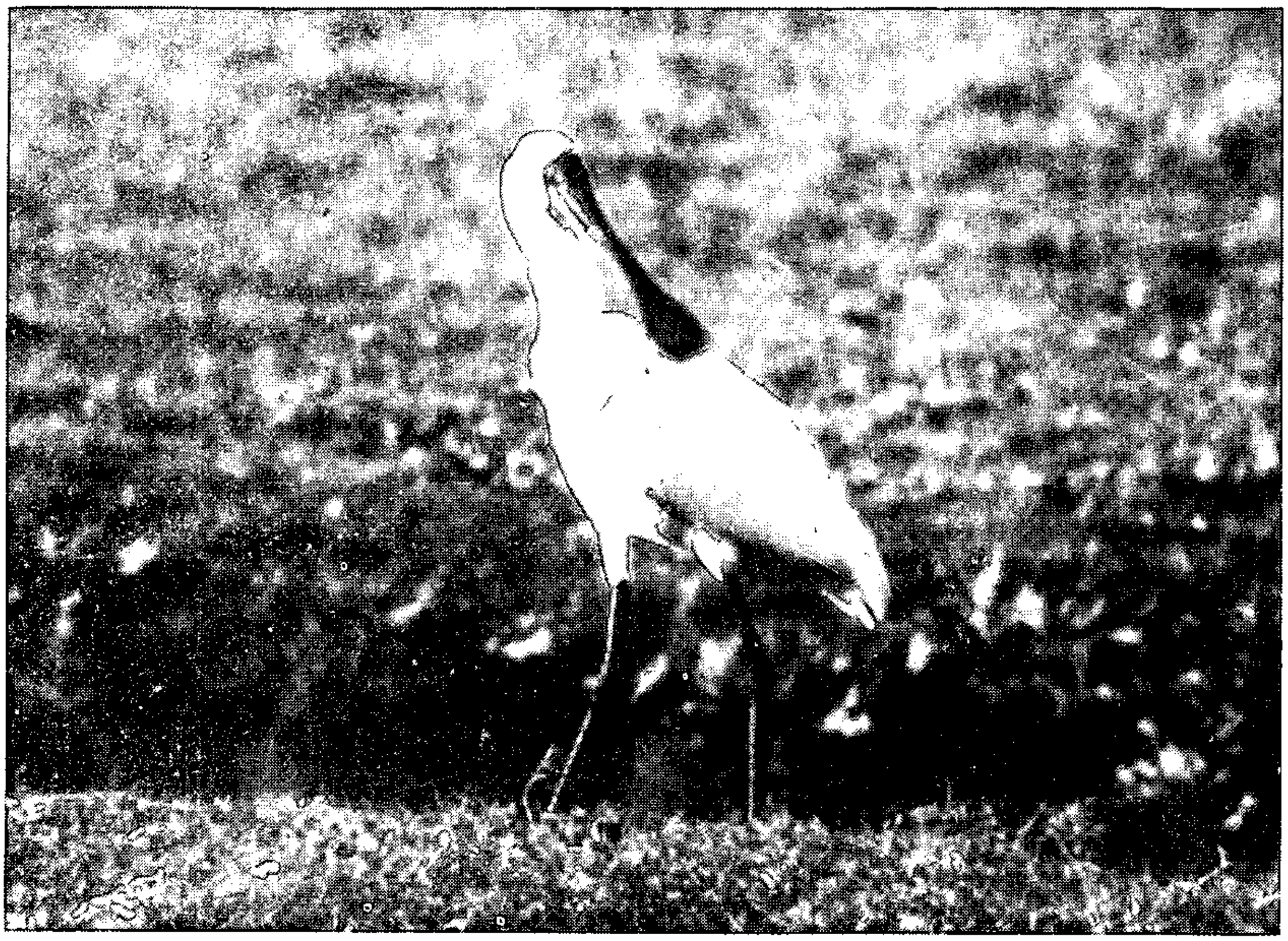
[Harry Wakelin

Plate XXII — White-faced Herons, lining a fence; Kingston Common, August 1967.

ROYAL SPOONBILL *(Platalea regia)*

During the whole of my stay in August 1963 a lone Royal Spoonbill was to be seen feeding in Watermill Creek on the Kingston Common. Mrs. Hoare also noted its presence, July 7th 1963, Watermill Creek, August 19th at the Swamp on Cascade Creek and again October 24th.

I understand it was later shot.



[Harry Wakelin

Plate XXIII — Royal Spoonbill on Kingston Common, August 1963.

GREY DUCK *(Anas superciliosa)*

In August 1963 on several occasions I saw three in the swamp between Watermill and Kingston.

In November 1965 I saw two in Cascade Stream near the foot of Red Road.

In August 1967 there was plenty of water about and I saw odd pairs in many places. They were very wary and unapproachable.

On August 9th when there were floods on Kingston Common there were a total of 52 on two ponds (one on the golf course and one behind the Administrator's House). As I was trying to stalk the ducks on the latter to photograph some of them, someone approached from the direction of the house and all the ducks flew and I did not see them in the area again.

CALIFORNIAN QUAIL *(Lophortyx californica)*

These are quite common. I have seen very young ones as early as the beginning of November and also in February.

HARRIER *(Circus approximans)*

These are sometimes seen in winter (c.f. Notornis 10, 304), apparently coming from New Zealand or Australia. They are not known to breed.

SWAMP HEN *(Porphyrio melanotus)*

(They are the same as our Pukeko and known locally as Tarler Birds).

These occur wherever there is water and some cover, but are most easily seen in the swamp below Mission Chapel. They are very wary.

I should imagine that a census would reveal 40 - 50 birds on the Island.

SPOTLESS CRAKE *(Porzana tabuensis)*

(Locally known as Little Tarler Bird.)

I have not seen any of these but I am given to understand that they still frequent the swamp below the Mission Chapel.

PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER *(Pluvialis dominica)*

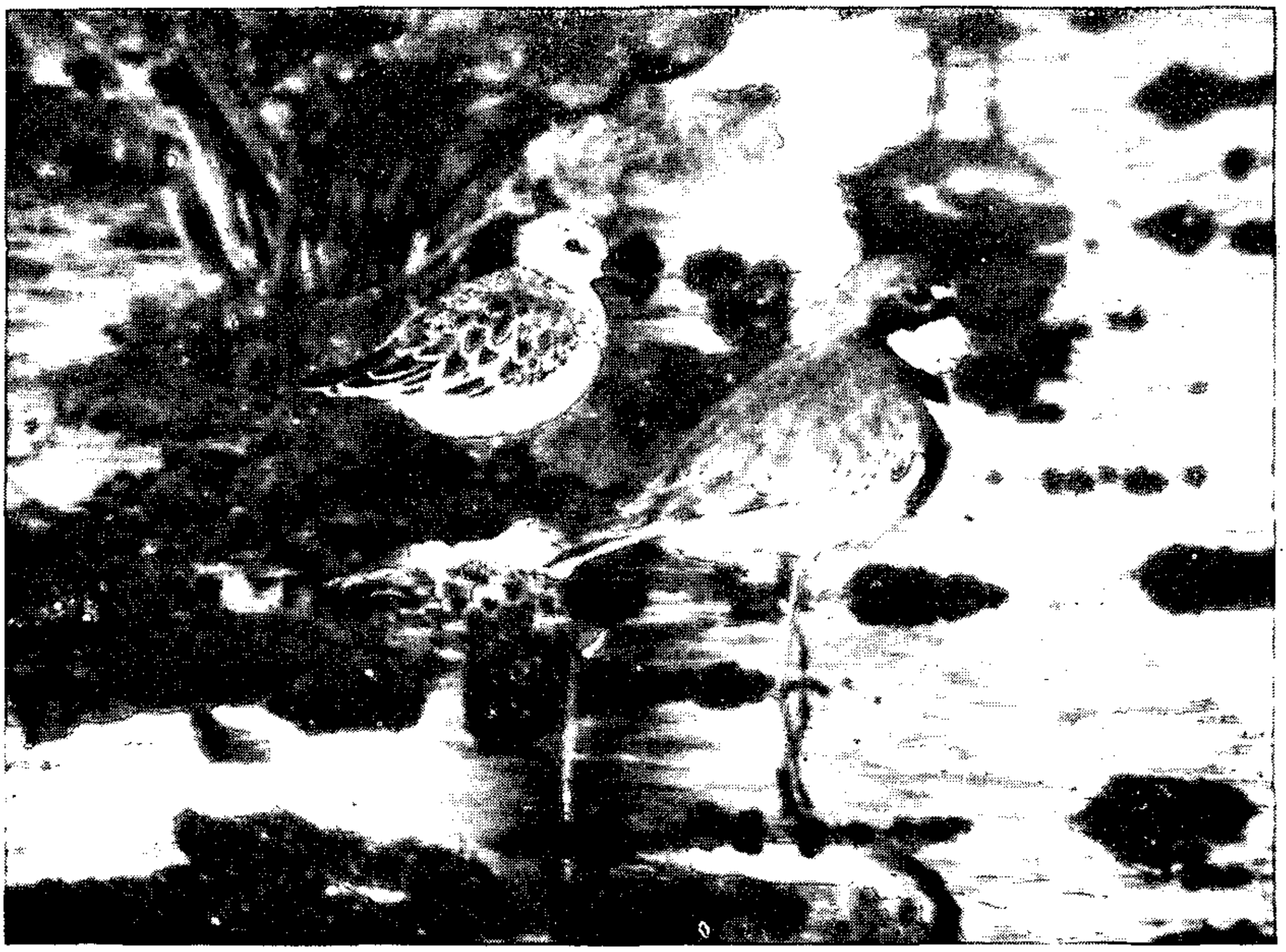
In November 1965 these birds were common anywhere where there was open grassland; they were very busy and hard to approach and seemed to be working singly.

In February 1967 there were many Golden Plover about, but not so numerous as in November 1965.

BANDED DOTTEREL *(Charadrius bicinctus)*

In August 1963 I saw 4 Banded Dotterel in full breeding plumage feeding on the swamp in Kingston Common.

In August 1967 I saw up to 10 at one time associating with Turnstones and Stints at floodwaters on Kingston Common and on the rocks at Slaughter Bay.



[Harry Wakelin

Plate XXIV — Banded Dotterel in breeding plumage on spring passage and Red-necked Stint; Kingston Common, August 1967.

ASIATIC WHIMBREL *(Numenius variegatus)*

In November 1965 I saw one of these for a few moments feeding with Godwits. I got an unsatisfactory photograph because of poor light, but enough to recognise it.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT *(Limosa lapponica)*

November 1965 in drought conditions, I saw four Godwits feeding on Kingston Common, mostly by turning over dry cow manure. I was able to watch them closely at times in Watermill Creek as there was nowhere else for them to feed on account of the prolonged drought. One had a drooping wing. They were to be seen during the whole of my visit, i.e. 1 - 17 November.

TURNSTONE *(Arenaria interpres)*

In November 1965 there were two flocks totalling about 24 on Kingston Common very busy feeding on what they could uncover under dry cow manure. They were very hard to approach.

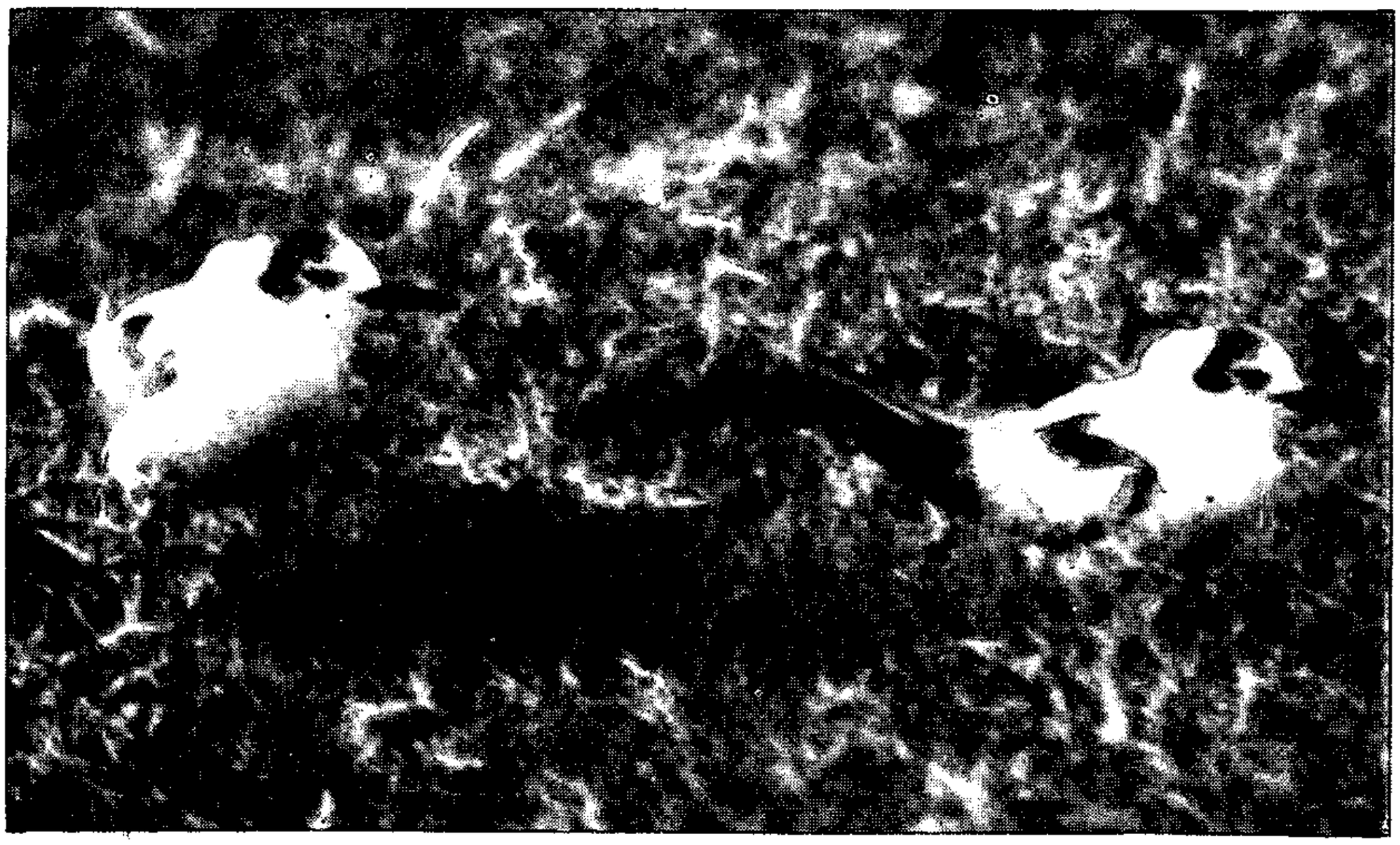
In August 1967 I saw four feeding alternatively between floodwater on Kingston Common and among rocks on Slaughter Bay at low tide. I found these much easier to approach than before.

RED-NECKED STINT *(Calidris ruficollis)*

In August 1967 I saw two stints in winter plumage associating with Turnstones and Banded Dotterel at Kingston Common and Slaughter Bay.

In February 1967 I saw four small waders flying momentarily which I did not have time to recognise; but having watched Stints in August 1967, I think that these are what I saw in February.

I was able to approach the Turnstones, Dotterels and Stints quite closely by following Mr. Ross McKenzie's method of concealing my legs as I scuffed across the sand on my seat.



[Harry Wakelin

Plate XXV — Two of four White-winged Black Terns on Kingston Common, February 1967.

WHITE-WINGED BLACK TERN *(Chlidonias leucopterus)*

In February 1967 I watched four, none in breeding dress, mostly flying endlessly up and down Watermill Creek, turning their heads this way and that, and every now and then dropping to the ground to pick up food without alighting. Finally they settled down on the ground long enough to allow me to bring back the photographic evidence.

SOOTY TERN *(Sterna fuscata)*

(Locally known as the Whale Bird)

These are very handsome birds with their black and white patches. To watch them in flight is something to behold. They have all sorts of ways of spreading their tails (so variable can its shape be, in fact, that you would almost think it wasn't the same bird).

They nest on the offshore islands in considerable numbers; but on Norfolk Island itself, only on the inaccessible cliffs and rocks of the north coast.

By law, the islanders are permitted to rob them of their eggs from October 1st until November 30th each year and they are considered a great delicacy. Great numbers of eggs are taken and on the days when the weather is suitable, I understand that it is a race to reach the best nesting grounds first. The yolks are said to be very red.

This notice taken from the Norfolk Island Government Gazette No. 98 is of some interest:

BIRD PROTECTION LAW 1913

THE WHALE BIRD (STERNA FULGINOSA) — CLOSE SEASON

PURSUANT to the provisions of Section 3 of the *Bird Protection Law* 1913, I, REGINALD MARCH, Administrator of Norfolk Island, DO HEREBY DECLARE a close season for the Whale Bird *(Sterna fuliginosa)* for the period from the Thirtieth day of November, One thousand nine hundred and sixty-seven to the Thirtieth day of September, One thousand nine hundred and sixty-eight, both days inclusive.

Reg. Marsh,

5/10/67 *Administrator*

In November 1965 I was able to visit Nepean Island and the first thing I saw after I had landed was a bucket full of Sooty Tern eggs waiting to be picked up. Because it was robbing season the birds were very scared and impossible to approach, but I found a few eggs which had been overlooked. They were laid straight on the ground, which in this case was dead coral which had disintegrated into sand. Most of the growth on this island was Ice-plant *(Mesembryanthemum)*.

In February 1967 I was able to see some young Sooty Terns at fairly close range on the cliffs. They have a speckled appearance and remind me of pine cones which have opened up to drop their seeds.

I understand the nesting grounds on Philip Island are extensive, but unfortunately so far I have not been able to go out there.

WHITE-CAPPED NODDY *(Anous minutus)*

Whenever I have been in Norfolk Island I have watched White-capped Noddies fishing at Cemetery Beach. In some lights they almost look as if they have no heads as the white of the heads blends with the white of the breaking waves, while this enhances the black of their bodies.

If you stand on the headland at the Emily Bay end of Cemetery Beach near dusk you will see them skim low around the cliff and over the headland. They are beautiful to watch.

I have been able to approach quite closely to them as they roost on the rocks; and when they are relaxed like this, they look rather top-heavy; but when they are nesting they look slimmer.

When I was there in November 1965 I was looking forward to seeing them nesting. I had some difficulty finding any information about the whereabouts of their nesting ground; but from what meagre information I could gather it seemed to be somewhere near Red Road. I set out confidently expecting them to be in full nesting as the Fairy Terns were. I set out from Red Road along the Bridle Track and turned right into the track leading to the late Mr. McLaughlin's place. Having reached the house I enquired from Mr. McLaughlin the whereabouts of the nesting grounds.

He, being a lonely old man, whose access to home was only by horse or by foot, said he would show me after a cup of morning tea. This was quite a process and involved long and varied conversation. (Mr. McLaughlin was a well educated man but had lived on the Island alone for about 40 years and consequently was pleased to have company.) The outcome was that we were still deeply engrossed in conversation when lunchtime came around. So to try and speed things up I gave him half my lunch, but still the conversation went on until, finally, I had to tell him that my wife expected me at Red Road at 2.30 p.m.

By the time we got moving it had begun to rain. We walked down the ridge behind his house towards the Blowhole. On the right was a valley full of Norfolk Island Pines. He called this Tetrach Valley (I understand Tetrach is the local name for White-capped Noddies) but that he had not seen any birds yet. And this was the case; there were no birds to be seen. He told me that sometimes, when the birds were nesting, the local boys used to stand on the ridge with sticks and beat the birds down to use as ground bait as they skimmed in low over the ridge on their way to the nesting grounds from the sea.

So I was still able to get back to where I had arranged to meet my wife by 2.30 accompanied by the old man.

When I returned in February 1967 I was taken by a friend into the area by another route. There were three valleys in which the trees held thousands of nesting Noddies. However, we had to make our way into the third valley before we could find a tree with a branch low enough to throw a rope over. Even so it was quite a climb up about 100 feet, to a convenient place for observation. The branches were just too far apart for comfortable climbing. However, it was well worth it as I got quite a range of photographs in the one tree. The nests which are very conspicuous because they

are covered with white droppings, look ridiculous as they are very scant and look as if they cannot possibly hold together; indeed, when I visited the same area the following August, I could not see the remains of any nests, the winter apparently having removed all traces.

The single egg is speckled on one end only.

In the breeding season the birds tend to have a purplish shade where one would expect them to be black. The little ones look rather quaint because right from the start they have a white cap like their parents. As the White Noddy (Fairy Tern) has tiny black feathers surrounding the eye, so, in reverse the White-capped Noddy has a band of tiny white feathers around the eye which stand out vividly against the black of the other feathers.

The noise in the nesting grounds is deafening and not very pleasant, in contrast to the noise of the Fairy Tern, which is quite soothing.

I had been told of a place on one of the cliffs where Noddies were nesting on the ground. After some difficulty I found only one nesting pair, in a place much exposed to the sun but sheltered from the wind (this was in contrast to the nests in trees which were for the most part in perpetual shade). These birds were really feeling the heat and spread their wings for coolness and were continually panting for air. Their feathers also were noticeably faded by the sun.

A pair of Sooty Terns had been nesting nearby and although I did not see the adults, I saw their young one with his head buried under the Noddy's nest.

FAIRY TERN *(Gygis alba)*

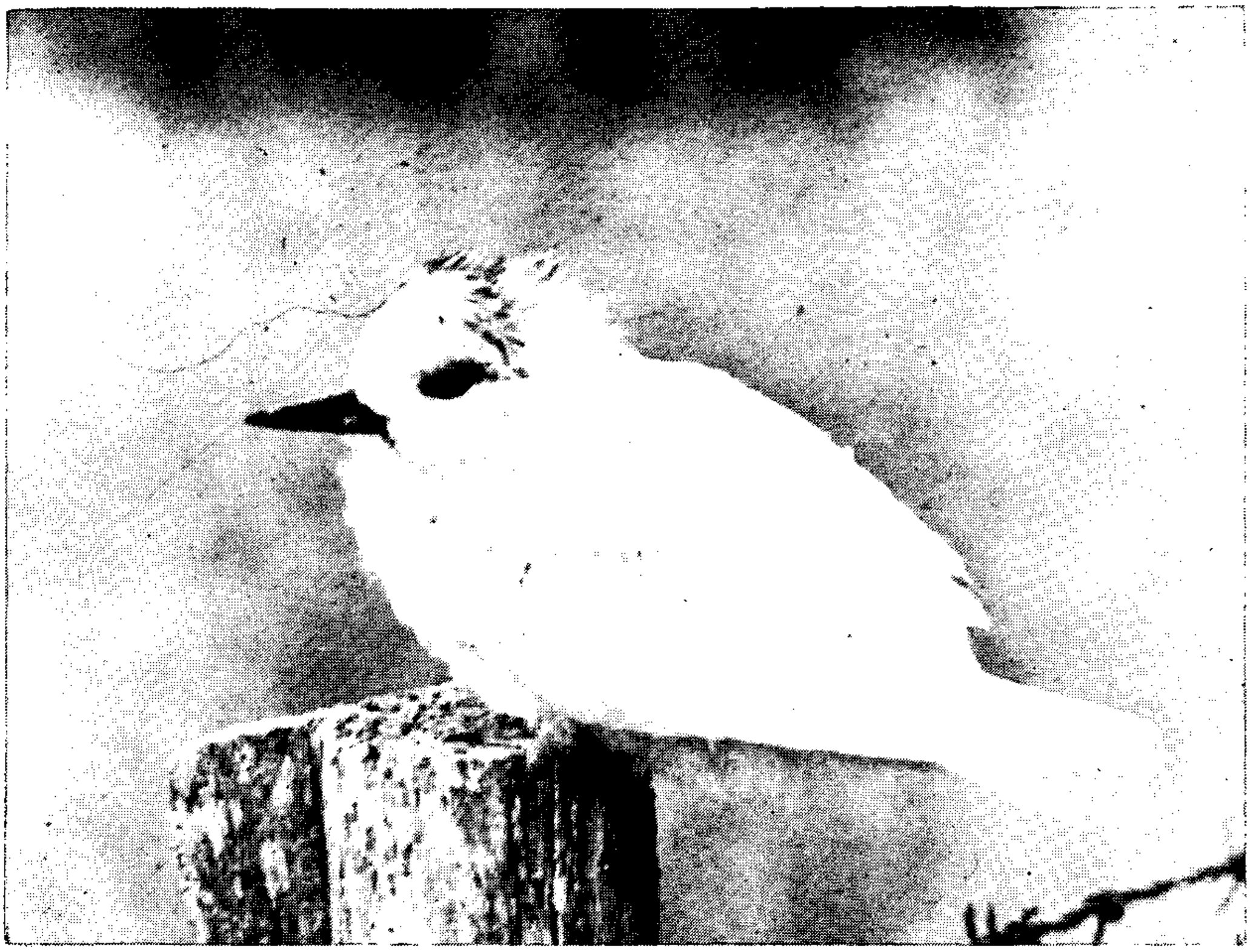
(Known also as White Noddy, White Tern, Pacific Tern, Love Tern — this last, because they cuddle close and appear to whisper in each other's ears.)

I find Fairy Terns the most interesting birds on the island, perhaps because they are the most easily observed. In August both in 1963 and 1967 there were few about — either stragglers from last season or early arrivals. In November 1965 breeding was in full swing. There were thousands of birds breeding mostly on Norfolk Island Pines, but also on White Oaks.

Always there was one egg laid directly on the tree branch where there is some flaw so that the egg will not roll off. The eggs are very speckled and vary much the same as other tern eggs both in colour and density of spots. At this time of the year in some places there are many eggshells on the grounds.

The young have beautiful soft grey down when hatched and have such a firm grip on the branch that it is said they cannot be removed without injury. However, in high winds they do get blown down in great numbers and if they are too young they perish quickly.

These terns commonly fly around in threes, which at first sight would appear to indicate 'eternal triangles'; but as this goes on during the breeding season, it seems possible that the young tern from the previous season does not yet breed and still accompanies its parents.



[Harry Wakelin

Plate XXVI — White Tern, still downy but nearly fledged.

White Terns feed their young on small fish about 2 inches long but sometimes bring in fish up to 4 inches long which are rejected by the young and discharged on the ground. Adults have been seen with as many as four fish in their beaks at the one time. They feed their young very gently and sometimes have some left over and will patiently brood their young while still retaining the surplus fish in their beaks. I disturbed one such adult and she swallowed the fish to the disgust of her young which sought a further feed a few minutes later.

The adults are very beautiful, pure white except for a ring of tiny black feathers around the eyes and black shafts on the primary wing feathers. Their beaks are a beautiful rifle barrel blue, very sharply pointed and slightly upturned, which leads one to think that they may skim the water for their food.

The young very soon develop a masklike appearance around the head which makes them look a bit stupid. At about one month, although still covered in down and nowhere near full size, their wings are well enough developed to enable them to flutter about for very limited distances, and they are sometimes to be found on the ground. This does not worry them as they are able to climb the trees again.

I watched as one climbed 10 feet up a tree. This feat took about half an hour and required gigantic effort and much resting. The action was to dig in the beak and by bending the neck and

using the feet to lever itself up the tree a little, at the same time spreading the wings and tail against the bark to stop it from slipping backwards.

This action was repeated again and again, in a spiral around the tree. The wing and tail feathers became very frayed with the rough bark. Altogether, it was a colossal effort.

A little older, when more fully fledged, but with a fair bit of down still showing through, I have seen them fly for several chains at a time. At this stage they attempt to obtain food from other parents, only to be rebuffed.

In February 1967, breeding was also in full swing. If these birds raise only one chick each season, the mortality rate must be very high indeed as there were very young birds everywhere. Of course I have no means of knowing whether the birds arrive together on their migration or arrive over a very long period. If the latter, this would account for the prolonged breeding period.

I was able to see the devastating effect of high winds on the young. Hurricane " Dinah " had just passed down the Australian coast and high winds were prevalent and consequently there were young to be seen on the ground everywhere.

These soon succumbed to black ants, which the islanders claim came from New Zealand during World War II with prefabricated army huts, and they claim they are the major cause of mortality among young birds of all varieties on the island.

[Harry Wakelin

Plate XXVII — Young White Tern scrambling back to nest.

In February the number of fully grown birds was very obviously much greater than in November, and in the mornings it was a great sight to see the morning exercise flights with hundreds of birds visible at once, flying in their threes above the trees and against the blue sky. When seen from close up, against the sky, the sun showing transparent through their wings, they are exquisite, truly earning themselves the name of Fairy Tern.

They are so adept on their wings that they are said to be able to recover fish which they have dropped, before it reaches the ground. They are curious birds and as one walks through the trees they often fly and hover close above one's head making a clicking sound, but never seem to be belligerent. Also, should one climb up a tree, they fly in and away, coming as close as within 18 inches.

GREY NODDY *(Procelsterna cerulea)*

It was while I was at Nepean Island I first saw Grey Noddies. They were flying about the cliffs taking every advantage of the air currents and were beautiful to watch. Somehow, to watch them, conjured up the thought of doves in my mind. I have not seen their nesting sites.

A few days later I was able to approach fairly closely to some resting on the rocks at Rock Point. Their colour is a similar grey to that of our Red-billed Gulls. They look to me like some museum specimens improperly finished around the eyes, because, like the other Noddies they have a narrow rim of contrasting coloured feathers around the eye.

In February 1967 I was able to watch them again playing in the air currents around the northern cliffs.

BLUE ROCK PIGEON *(Columba livia)*

There are quite a number of these. They are very unapproachable. They appear on an official list of protected birds.

GREEN AND BRONZE DOVE *(Chalcophaps chrysochlora)*

These stocky doves are seen mostly on the ground. They are akin to the Australian Greenwinged Pigeon. They feed restlessly like domestic fowls, moving about and pecking at the same time and are not easy to photograph. They are very handsome with their emerald green backs (with a conspicuous white bar on the shoulder) and their bronze head and breast. The orange beak almost looks transparent about the colour of ripe coprosma berries in the sun. In August they were seen to be feeding on olive berries. Their flight is swift.

CRIMSON ROSELLA *(Platycercus elegans)*

These birds are common, both in built-up areas and in the bush. They nest in chimneys and holes in trees. They are the most colourful birds on the island being bright crimson on the head, breast and underparts, and showing dark blue on the back, wings and tail. When in flight the spread wing and tail feathers show pale blue. Some birds appear to be dark green on the back [Immature — Ed.]

Apart from a typical parrot screech they also have rather a bell-like song. They fly very fast with a flash of crimson and

[Harry Wakelin

Plate XXVIII — Pair of Crimson Rosellas on broken top of dead pine, Anson Bay, August 1967.

blues and are a sight long to be remembered. In August I saw them feeding on centres of Norfolk Pine needles, in November in a wheatfield, and in February on Lantana berries.

GREEN PARROT *(Cyanoramphus verticalis)*

These birds are very like the Red-fronted Parakeet of New Zealand, having a red frontal cap, green bodies and blue on the primaries. They live in the bush but make incursions into the orchards after fruit, peaches being their favourite right from the time the fruits first form. Because of this, their numbers have been reduced by shooting. They are elusive and are rarely seen, but when approached tend to be curious and will stand and stare when one makes unusual noises. This probably partly explains their rarity. Their chattering reminds me of subdued Kookaburra noises.

SHINING CUCKOO *(Chalcites lucidus)*

I heard one of these in February 1967. No doubt they use the local warblers for foster parents.

NORFOLK ISLAND OWL *(Ninox royana)*

I understand these are still occasionally heard in the Mt. Pitt area. They are closely related to the New Zealand Morepork and the Australian Boobook.

KINGFISHER *(Halcyon sancta)* (Locally known as N'folker.)

I probably saw more in August 1967 as there was much more

water about than usual; although in February 1967 when they were mostly feeding away from water on insects in the grass, I found them fairly common.

NORFOLK ISLAND SPARROW *(Lalage leucopyga)*

This is a very rare bird bordering on extinction. It is said to be black and white. The last report was of a flock disturbed by forestry men deep in the bush. Apart from this they don't appear to have been sighted for years.

[According to Mayr (Birds of S.W.P. p. 88), the Norfolk Island Triller or Caterpiller-catcher is the southernmost of six subspecies of *leucopyga,* which are found from New Caledonia to the New Hebrides and Solomon Islands. Ed.]

NORFOLK ISLAND THICKHEAD *(Pachycephala xanthoprocta)*

(Locally known as Tamey.)

This is another bird of the bush. It is a little larger than a common sparrow. It absolutely ignores the presence of humans and busily goes about its business as if they don't exist. 'Tamies' forage in the bush canopy and on the ground as well, where they will come very close to one's feet. I have seen them eating both insects and berries.

In November they have quite a strong song, but in February seem to be silent except for a sharp whistle while feeding their young. They are easy to call up by imitating this whistle. The name "Tamey" is very apt.

[Harry Wakelin

Plate XXIX — Norfolk Island Thickhead (Tamey) on Mt. Pitt, August 1967.

WARBLER *(Gerygone modesta)*

These look rather like a New Zealand Grey Warbler and appear to act in much the same way although I saw one which was more of a greyish mossy green than straight out grey. Their song seems immature and rather slurred at the end instead of being bold like its New Zealand counterpart. They are quite plentiful. I found a nest which had fallen from a tree — and it had the same pear shape as our own warbler's.

[Harry Wakelin

Plate XXX — Norfolk Island Fantail, February 1967.

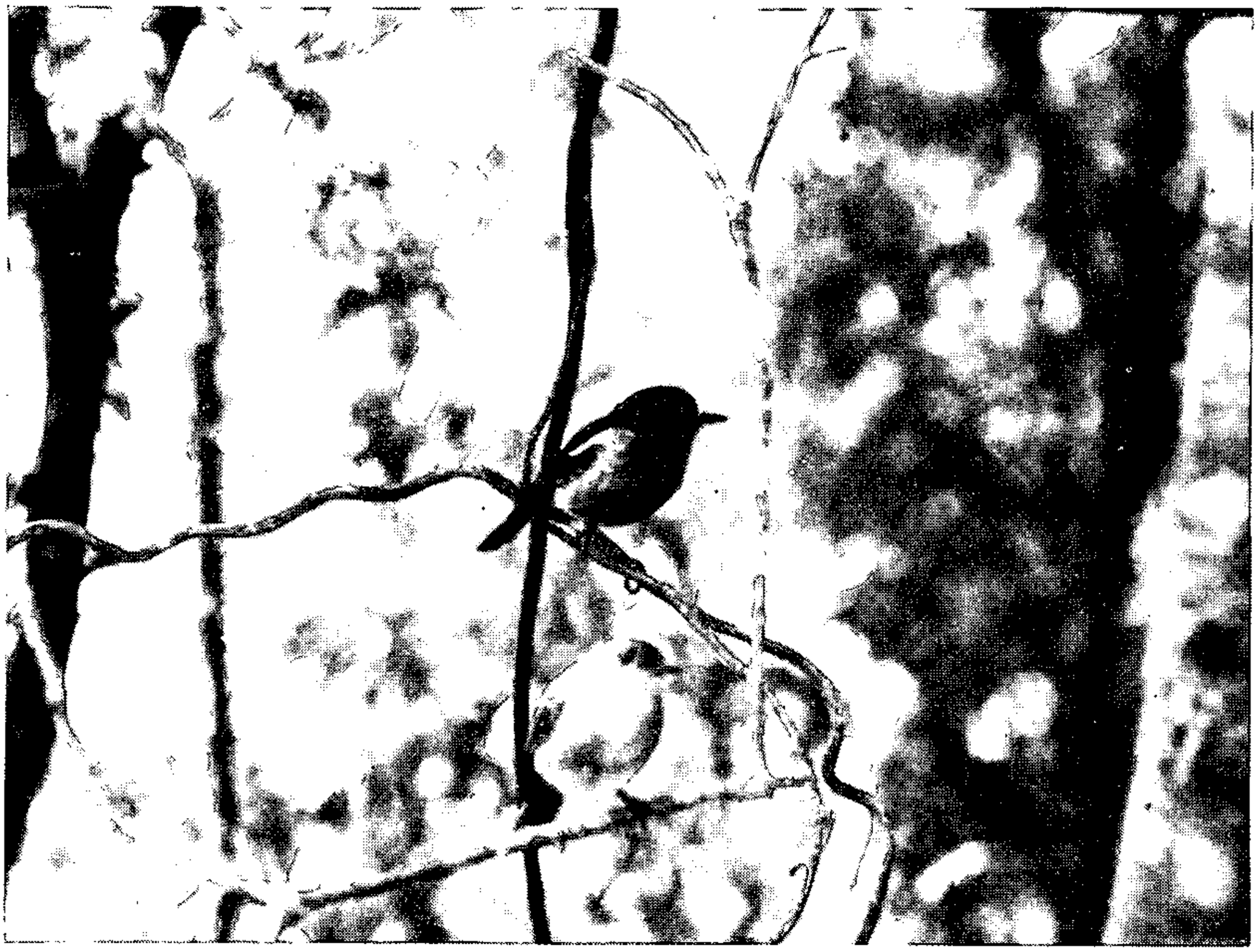
FANTAIL *(Rhipidura pelzelni)*

These are very much like our New Zealand Fantails and their actions and behaviour are similar. They are fairly numerous and especially noticeable around August before the breeding season when they disperse into the bush and become quite secretive.

SCARLET ROBIN *(Petroica multicolor)*

These beautiful birds are nowadays said to be rare, but once I found out their song I had no difficulty in finding them. The cock bird, with his jet black head, throat and back, relieved by a brilliant white patch on the forehead and patches of white on the secondary coverts, and his bright scarlet breast is a sight to be seen. He usually sings high up in the trees in the sun, which shows his colours superbly. His song is not unlike that of a Chaffinch. Near the ground and when feeding, he is silent.

His mate is also very beautiful. Her back is mostly brown and her breast is a beautiful sunset colour. I will never forget the first one I saw. It was in the deep bush and all of a sudden I noticed her just a few feet away, framed nicely in a bent twig, unafraid and silently watching me as if she wondered who the intruder was. The sunset flush on her breast was very conspicuous. In the bush these birds are usually seen in pairs and close to the ground.



[Harry Wakelin

Plate XXXI — Pair of Scarlet Robins on Mt. Pitt, February 1967.

In February, 1967, I saw a cock bird singing in the sun on a dead, lichen covered branch. On the approach of a hen bird he stopped singing, left his perch and swooped in a tight circle around her a number of times at a very high speed.

In August 1967, I saw what looked like a hen robin singing the cock's song. I presumed it to be an immature male. This could possibly be a cock bird, capable of breeding, but still in immature plumage. In "Wild Life in Australia," March 1967, Roy P. Cooper mentions that he has records of cock Red-capped Robins and Flame Robins breeding in the brown phase. He has in his article a photograph of one such Red-capped young male at the nest. These birds are very closely related to the Scarlet Robin, so probably have similar breeding characteristics. [The same species — Ed.]

GREY-HEADED BLACKBIRD *(Turdus poliocephalus)*
(Locally known as Guava-bird.)

This bird is possibly extinct but was fairly common until recent years. It belongs to the thrush family, is about the size and colour of a hen European Blackbird with a grey shawl thrown over the head and neck.

BLACKBIRD *(Turdus merula)*
Plentiful.

SONG THRUSH *(Turdus philomelos)*
Fairly common, but not so numerous as the Blackbird.

GREY-BACKED WHITE-EYE *(Zosterops lateralis)*

These were very numerous in February feeding on Lantana berries; but not so noticeable at other times, possibly because they are very vulnerable to predation by cats. The most conspicuous group I saw were feeding on a Paw-Paw, the bright orange interior of which seemed to set them off to perfection.

SLENDER-BILLED WHITE-EYE *(Zosterops tenuirostris)*

These were described by Mathews after being collected at Kingston and the Cascades in 1913. Little now seems to be known about them; but I have a photograph in colour of what appears to be one.

[Harry Wakelin

Plate XXXII — A White-eye that looks different, both in colouring and also in the shape and size of the bill; possibly **Z. tenuirostris.**

GREENFINCH *(Chloris chloris)*

I have seen a flock of about 12 at Ball Bay in November. There are usually a few feeding at the cemetery.

GOLDFINCH *(Carduelis carduelis)*

In August 1967 I saw two in New Cascade Road and also two towards Palm Glen. These sightings were about 1 mile apart.

COMMON SPARROW *(Passer domesticus)*

After the Starlings, Sparrows are the most numerous passerines.

STARLING *(Sturnus vulgaris)*

These are the most numerous introduced birds. They nest commonly in holes in the Norfolk Pines.

[It should be mentioned that the illustrations are all taken from the author's colour slides. Ed.]

★

SHORT NOTE

WELCOME SWALLOWS NESTING IN CHRISTCHURCH

On 1/2/67 Raymond Melhopt took me to see a Welcome Swallow *(H. neoxena)* nest containing three young, almost fledged. It was in a culvert under a roadway at Bromley. The adults were easily spotted as they continually flew in and out of the culvert. This, I believe, is the first report of Welcome Swallows nesting in the city area, although they were breeding at L. Ellesmere as long ago as 1961.

The nest was placed about fourteen feet from the entrance in the middle culvert of three which drain the Canal Reserve into the Heathcote-Avon estuary. The culvert, which is approximately in a N.W.-S.E. direction, is closed at the southern end by flood-gates. A depth of about nine inches of water is continually flowing through the culvert, while a heavy volume of traffic passes over it. The nest was five inches long, had a clearance of 1½ inches from the roof and was 39 inches above the surface of the water. It was made of mud and dried grass and was lined with poultry feathers. The chicks were viewed daily from Feb. 1st - 7th, when they would take to flight very quickly. By March they were often seen over the long stretches of water in the district but the nest was deserted.

— B. N. NORRIS