

SHORT NOTES

BROWN BOOBY IN BAY OF ISLANDS

On 17/5/68 about an hour before full tide 22 Gannets and 26 Pied Shags congregated to feed on a shoal of small fish, close inshore below my house on Kerikeri Inlet. The feast continued for about half an hour and was the source of quite unusual excitement and activity. The water was full of diving and surfacing shags, amongst which the Gannets dived continuously, sometimes shallow diving at an acute angle to the surface of the water, sometimes high diving from a height of 20-40 feet. Normally rather silent birds, on this occasion the Gannets were surprisingly vocal, frequently uttering one or other of two calls, a short "kook" and a rather high-pitched "kerree" or "skerree." Diving and circling amongst the Gannets was a Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster plotus*). This bird had first been seen on 13th May, fishing with a few Gannets, but too far out in midstream for effective observation, and was at that time thought to be probably a young gannet. On 17th May there was no doubt of its identity as the diagnostic characters — dark neck and chest, white underparts, underwing pattern of white bordered with brown, narrowly on the leading edge and more broadly on the trailing edge — were clearly seen in flight.

Gradually the intense activity declined; one by one the shags withdrew to dry off on the rocks, and the Gannets and Booby settled over a wide area of water. The Gannets rested, the Booby rested and preened until after the turn of the tide, when all the birds moved upstream to fish in a more leisurely manner for about an hour and a half before departing down the Inlet towards the open sea. On 18th May, again at about full tide, 23 Gannets flew up the Inlet in line ahead formation, followed later by 5 more Gannets and the Booby and joined by 11 Pied Shags. After fishing for a time in mid-channel the Gannets and Booby followed a shoal close inshore and engaged in a short period of very active fishing only a few yards out from a coastal shell-bank.

On 19th May the Booby was again present, this time fishing with 8 Gannets, in midstream on a falling tide. From 20th May till 3rd June it has not been seen, although Gannets have been on the Inlet on several occasions.

Although the Booby attached itself to the Gannets on and when moving to the fishing grounds it acted independently after the main fishing period was over. On 18th May, while the Gannets drifted down the Inlet towards the sea without any haste, the Booby flew by itself, straight, fast and low over the water. On 19th May the Gannets finished fishing and left the area at about 1645 hours, but the Booby fished on alone till about 1720 hours, sat on the water for ten minutes, and eventually flew straight and fast down the Inlet at 1730 hours, just before dusk. During the period of intense activity on 17th May my impression was that the Booby performed much wider aerial circles between dives than did the Gannets.

Although most of the records of Brown Boobies in New Zealand have been in the period December-March (Hauraki Gulf, 1952, 1953 and 1955; Cavallis, 1955; Bay of Plenty, 1960; Raglan, 1961; Takatu,

1962; Firth of Thames, 1965) there are records for May (Otaki, 1957), July (Napier, 1884), and September (Hauraki Gulf, 1962). The Kerikeri bird may have been blown south by gales which occurred in the second week of April, 1968.

Body somewhat smaller than a Gannet's, wings slightly shorter and seemingly narrower, it appeared to be a young bird in transitional plumage. The underwing pattern has already been mentioned. The white underparts were only slightly sullied, clearly demarcated from the dark brown neck and chest. Crown a warm brown when seen in full sunlight; upper parts brown, and the feathers appeared to have narrow slightly paler fringes, noted on two occasions when the bird was flying away from me with the sun in the right direction. In bright sunlight the bill was so shiny that its colour was difficult to see; in a better light it was noted as slaty grey with a blue tinge; the facial skin was also greyish, rather lighter in shade than the bill. Feet orange yellow; this could not be distinguished in flight but during the preen which followed fishing activity on 17th May the bird lifted one foot out of the water and gave a good view at fairly close range. The feather maintenance was fairly prolonged and apparently included an oil preen, as the bird was seen pecking at its rump, tail fanned and twisted to one side. Later the bill was rubbed over the rump, and this was followed by stroking and drawing movements and nibble preening. While the preening bird was working on the region of rump and upper tail coverts some of the displaced brown feathers appeared to have whitish bases. — A. T. EDGAR



BROWN TEAL RELEASED ON KAPITI ISLAND

Ten Brown Teal (*Anas aucklandica chlorotis*) were released by the Wildlife Service onto Okupe Lagoon, Kapiti Island, on 5 June, 1968. The liberation comprised six males (five hatched early December 1967, one an adult originally from Great Barrier Island) and four females (three hatched September 1967, one in December 1967). The nine young birds were all reared at the Mount Bruce Native Bird Reserve. The lagoon was revisited on 15 October 1968 and one Brown Teal female accompanied by four day-old ducklings were seen. Further Kapiti liberations of Mount Bruce-reared birds are planned and from this nucleus it is hoped that the species will eventually re-establish itself throughout the Manawatu coastal lake system.

— M. J. WILLIAMS



SMALL FLOCK OF WRYBILLS INLAND IN HAWKES BAY

On 5/4/68 I visited Lake Hatuma near Waipukurau in order to show a friend the Welcome Swallows which are usually to be seen there now. We found twelve Wrybills (*A. frontalis*) feeding on the mud which is quite extensive when the water is low. The lake is shallow and during a dry spell there is a considerable beach. I have often seen Wrybills on the mudflats at Porangahau rivermouth, some twenty miles from L. Hatuma.

— HAZEL WATERS

(Records of the Wrybill away from the coast in the North Island are very few. The attractiveness of L. Hatuma for migrant waders was mentioned in Notornis 13, 171-2. At Porangahau where Wrybills may now be regular visitors on their migrations, they were first noted by Guthrie-Smith in October, 1910. — Ed.)