

NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF NORTH EASTERN FIORDLAND

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INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 1966-67 the writer assisted in a study in North Eastern Fiordland conducted by the Forest and Range Experiment Station of the New Zealand Forest Service.

The area is forested throughout to about 3,500 feet with high tussock grasslands above. The ranges are seldom over 5,000 feet.

During this work the writer recorded observations on the birds in the area bounded by the Glaisnock in the north, the Doon in the south, the Fiordland divide in the west and Lake Te Anau in the east.

Nomenclature and presentation order follow Fleming (1953).

THE BIRDS

KIWI *Apteryx* spp.

Probings were found in the Wapiti and Glaisnock Valleys and occasional calls were heard. The species were unidentified. A tramping party captured a juvenile Little Grey *A. oweni* in George Sound and *A. australis*, which was recorded in the Caswell Sound/Stillwater area by the N.Z. American Fiordland Expedition in 1949 (Bull and Falla 1951), may also be present.

SOUTHERN CRESTED GREBE *Podiceps cristatus*

Two pairs were seen — one on Lake Te Anau at the mouth of the Lugar Burn and the other on the Bid Burn lake. The latter pair was tending a clutch of 4 eggs (29/1/67), half of which were eventually destroyed by a rise in lake level in early February.

DABCHICK *P. rufopectus*

A possible sighting on Lake Thomson was reported by a member of the team in November. No further sightings were made. Dabchicks were recorded by the Fiordland Expedition on Lakes Thomson and Sutherland.

BLACK SHAG *Phalacrocorax carbo* and

WHITE-THROATED SHAG *P. melanoleucos*

Occasional sightings of both species were made on Lakes Te Anau, Hankinson and Thomson. The White-throated Shag was recorded more frequently and was sometimes seen on the larger rivers.

CANADA GOOSE *Branta canadensis*

A group of 4-12 adults and young was frequently seen on Lake Sutherland. This lake has substantial areas of swampy flats around its perimeter that provide an excellent habitat for waterfowl. Five adult geese were seen on Lake Thomson.

BLACK SWAN *Cygnus atratus*

A pair of adults with two cygnets were observed during November and December on Lake Sutherland.

PARADISE DUCK *Tadorna variegata*

Pairs of Paradise Ducks were frequently seen on the lakes and river flats of the main valleys and tributaries. A group of 4-10 adults were often present on the flats at the head of Lake Sutherland. One pair near the outlet of this lake hatched a brood of ten ducklings.

BROWN TEAL *Anas castanea*

The only record of this uncommon species was provided by a single female, frequently observed at close range, in association with a pair of Grey Ducks and young on Lake Sutherland.

BLUE DUCK *Hymenolaimus malacorhynchos*

Pairs of these ducks were seen frequently along all the rivers in the survey area. Juveniles and young were observed occasionally throughout the summer.

GREY DUCK *Anas superciliosa*

There were a few adults and young on the lakes and larger rivers but nowhere was the species numerous.

NEW ZEALAND SCAUP *Aythya novaeseelandiae*

Adults and young were common on all lakes in the area. Groups of up to twenty were observed on Lake Hankinson. This species was not recorded by the Fiordland Expedition. It is the most abundant duck in the study area.

NEW ZEALAND FALCON *Falco novaeseelandiae*

Falcons were seldom seen but a few were heard calling in flight.

WEKA *Gallirallus australis*

Wekas were abundant in all watersheds from valley floor to the scrub line. A considerable range of colour variation was noted, individuals ranging from light brown to almost black. Most of those in the Hankinson/Thomson area were of the dark phase whereas the ratio of light to dark approximated unity in most other areas. Chicks and fledglings were frequently observed accompanying the parent birds.

TAKAHE *Notornis mantelli*

One adult pair and a chick were seen and photographed in early February in the Doon Valley by two members of the party who had previously been advised by Mr. D. Stack, Wildlife Division Ranger, that Takahe sign had been reported in this area.

The birds were seen on the tussock and scrub flat at the head of Lake Wapiti and additional sign was discovered in the true right branch of the Doon.

It is possible that Takahe have a much wider range in Fiordland than was formerly suspected and that small populations in unfrequented valleys remain undetected.

BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus dominicanus*

Black-backed Gulls were frequently seen flying over the "tops." Five individuals in the Lugar Burn were seen to feed from a deer carcase. These gulls seldom descended to the valley floor.

BLACK-BILLED GULL *Larus bulleri*

Occasionally seen flying over Lakes Te Anau, Hankinson and Thomson.

NEW ZEALAND PIGEON *Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*

Pigeons were widely distributed throughout the area, being abundant in areas of *Hoheria* where they fed on shoots and flowers. They also were seen feeding in Kowhai *Sophora*, *Fuchsia* and Wineberry *Aristotelia*.

KAKA *Nestor meridionalis*

Kakas were in fair numbers in most of the watersheds and were usually observed flying across the valleys in the evenings. The largest group recorded (near Hankinson Hut), contained ten birds.

KEA *Nestor notabilis*

Although only occasional sightings were made in the forest, this parrot was common above the bush-line in all areas. A flock of 21 was seen on the Wapiti/Edith saddle in early December.

YELLOW-CROWNED PARAKEET *Cyanoramphus auriceps*

Parakeets heard or seen on the wing were unidentifiable, but on three occasions individuals were approached to close range and positively identified as the yellow-crowned species. In the Lugar Burn four parakeets were observed feeding on the bush floor among a flock of Yellowheads.

SHINING CUCKOO *Chalcites lucidus* and**LONG-TAILED CUCKOO *Eudynamis taitensis***

In no areas were either of these species abundant. Most of the records were of calls heard in low altitude forest. The frequency of records declined from the beginning of February, presumably because both species began their northward migrations.

MOREPORK *Ninox novaeseelandiae*

Although no birds were sighted, the frequency of calls heard in all valleys indicates a relatively high density.

RIFLEMAN *Acanthisitta chloris*

Riflemen were very common in lowland beech forest and pairs were often seen accompanied by young of the year.

ROCK WREN *Xenicus gilviventris*

Common above the bush-line, especially in the tussock/scrub basins of valley heads. Although usually in pairs, groups of 4-6 were sometimes seen.

FANTAIL *Rhipidura fuliginosa*

Nowhere were Fantails abundant, about 60 individuals being seen during the three months, 12% of which were of the melanistic phase. (13% melanistic were recorded by the Fiordland Expedition). Groups of up to six birds of both phases were recorded in areas of Ribbonwood.

YELLOW-BREASTED TIT *Petroica macrocephala*

Adults and juveniles were very common in all localities from valley floor to the scrub-line. The intensity of the yellow coloration on the male's breast ranged from off white to a rich orange, the most usual being a lemon or pale cream.

ROBIN *Petroica (Miro) australis*

One bird was seen at the mouth of the Lugar Burn; no further sightings were made. However, Robins are relatively abundant in the Grebe Valley, south of Lake Manapouri.

BROWN CREEPER *Finschia novaeseelandiae*

This species was seldom recorded possibly because of its retiring habits. Occasional individuals or groups were seen in the Lugar Burn, Mid Burn and Glaisnock.

YELLOWHEAD *Mohoua ochorcephala*

The number of observations varied greatly between watersheds. Few were recorded in the Wapiti River but they were common in the Lugar Burn, although seldom found away from the valley floor. A flock of approximately 40 individuals (with four Parakeets) was seen feeding on ground in the Lugar Burn.

GREY WARBLER *Gerygone igata*

Grey Warblers were recorded in large numbers from all valleys. Young birds were seen on several occasions.

SONG THRUSH *Turdus ericetorum*

Seen only rarely and appeared to be confined to lower altitudes.

BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula*

Common throughout the area from river level to the scrub-line. Blackbirds were frequently observed foraging on the bush floor.

PIPIT *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

Common on tussock grasslands, open head-basins and areas of moraine.

BELLBIRD *Anthornis melanura*

Bellbirds were abundant in Ribbonwood stands throughout the area. Noisy flocks of 12-15 juveniles were common in such areas.

TUI *Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*

An uncommon species, seen occasionally in forested areas of all watersheds except the Mid Burn.

WHITE-EYE *Zosterops lateralis*

Flocks of White-eyes were common in open bush and scrub at all altitudes.

REDPOLL *Carduelis flammea*

Redpolls, although abundant, appeared restricted to the alpine scrub zone and the lower snowgrass slopes. A nest with young was discovered in the Wapiti River (4/12/66).

CHAFFINCH *Fringilla coelebs*

Chaffinches were seen at all altitudes below scrub line. Nests and young were occasionally seen in Ribbonwood stands.

YELLOWHAMMER *Emberiza citrinella*

This introduced species was only seen rarely and appeared to be confined to higher altitudes.

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