FURTHER RECORD OF ORIENTAL CUCKOO

An unusual corpse was found in debris on the beach at Muriwai, west coast of Auckland, on 21/12/69. The body had been largely cleaned by beach crustaceans, but plumage (except for back of head and upper back) was mostly intact, the bill and feet being little faded. The bird had probably fallen exhausted into the surf offshore, and come up with petrels and other derelicts picked up at the same time.

The bird as shown by the plumage is an adult of the rufous phase of the Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus saturatus horsfieldi*, and therefore a female (Mayr 1945, Birds of the Southwest Pacific), the head and back having dark brown bars on a cinnamon to chestnut-brown ground, and the tail being similarly barred; underparts white, barred black; bill dark brown, orange-yellow at gape and dull yellow along the lower ridge of lower mandible; feet yellow, claws brown.

Measurements: Culmen 21 mm., wing 183, tail 147, tarsus 19, third toe 27.

There are no pale tips to the feathers dorsally, i.e., the bird is not immature.

The specimen has been placed in the Auckland Museum (No. AV. 1229.1).

—SYLVIA M. REED

LETTERS

THE FUTURE OF ORNITHOLOGY IN NEW ZEALAND: ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

A recent appraisal of priorities in New Zealand ornithology (Hamel, 1969) concludes that insufficient attention is being paid to matters of theory. I have no argument with the topics raised as significant questions worthy of more active exploration. It would however be a loss to the long term study of ornithology if those currently fashionable questions, essentially the province of professionals, should detract from the continued recording of phenological and numerical data which form a large part of the output of Notornis.

The recording of species lists, numbers, and isolated observations on behaviour can seem plodding and without intellectual merit beside the sophisticated goings on of professional biology. But there are significant areas of biology that can only be approached through the long term accumulation of reliable data, and it is of greatest importance that this work should not be regarded as less respectable or worthwhile. Changes in bird populations, extinctions and diversifications of faunas in relation to quaternary changes, for example, can only be studied through the patient accumulation of data, largely by generations of amateurs, who need no quick return on their investment of time.

The New Zealand ornithological scene is of special significance here, given an insular fauna under observation by a group within which some quality control is possible. Perhaps the data are not as uniform as could be desired, perhaps more could be done to systemtize observation, but nothing should be done to discourage the recording of simple facts, regardless of theory, or the perpetuation of a corps of competnent observers. To paraphrase the words of the great neurologist Ramon Y. Cajal, theories may come and go, but facts go on forever.