

ROOKS ON THE WAIUKU PENINSULA

By MURRAY E DOUGLAS

ABSTRACT

This article is an account of the first recorded Rooks in the Waiuku area, their recorded sightings and nestings, over the past five years. The arrival of two at first and the appearance of a third bird after four years of their establishment.

The first report of Rooks *Corvus frugilegus* on the west Waiuku area, South Auckland, was by Mr. Ben S. Ross, of Waiuku, foreman there of the Franklin Electric Power Board, to Mr. Norman Douglas, of Kaihau Road, Taurangaruru, Waiuku Peninsula.

Ben S. Ross and the men with him were, on 28/10/64, disconnecting the electricity from an old farmhouse at the end of Craig's Road (one inch to one mile Map Ref. N47/175167) when they noticed two agitated large black birds. A big nest of sticks, enough to fill a wheelbarrow, was located about sixty feet up in the crown of a flat-topped green pine (*Pinus pinea*). As the men were leaving, one bird returned to the nest. The two birds were again seen on 8/11/64.

On 5/12/64 H. R. McKenzie went with Ben Ross and two of his men to the nest. No birds were seen.

On 7/12/64 D. V. Merton, H. R. McKenzie, Ben Ross and one of his men found the nest to be definitely deserted. A 30-foot extension ladder reached hardly half-way and the tree was quite unclimbable. Droppings on the ground below the nest could have been from young which had fledged but were more likely to have been from the roosting adults. Two birds were later seen by Mr. Craig on a hillside pasture not far away.

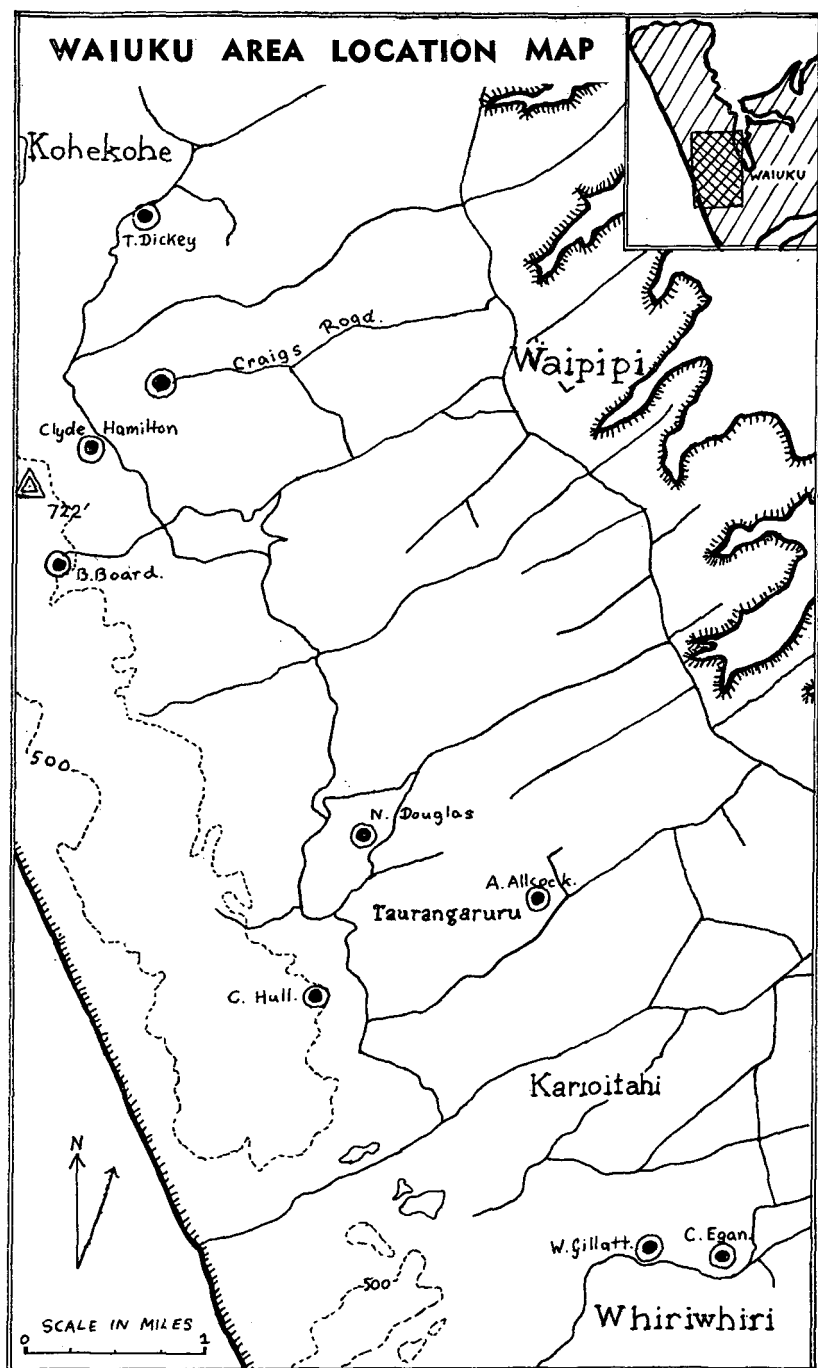
1965 produced several reported distant sightings of dark birds, all close sightings being of two only.

On 1/10/65 N. Douglas heard that they were living at Mr. Colin Hull's farm (N47/190104). On 6/1/66, on further evidence, N. Douglas, Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Brown, W. L. Moisley, H. R. McKenzie and the writer went to Hull's and saw the birds distinctly. A nest was found about sixty feet up in a pine tree (*Pinus radiata*). I returned a few days later but the nest by that time was not being used, though it looked quite fresh. Mrs. Hull later heard the birds a few times. There is, of course, no doubt that this was a 1965 nest. In the autumn of 1966 they established themselves at the farm of Mr. B. F. Board (N47/167148).

In the spring of 1966 they nested at Mr. Con Egan's farm at Whiri Whiri (N51/232080), near Waiuku. I did not hear about it until it was too late to investigate.

On 2/9/66 J. L. Kendrick and A. M. C. Davis saw the two birds and considered them to be Rooks. During 1966-67 N. Douglas saw them several times flying over his farm, one mile N. of Hull's.

In the spring of 1967 they nested in the trees on the farm of Mr. L. T. Allcock at Taurangaruru. The birds suddenly departed and were next reported at Colin Hull's. On 1/10/67 they were positively identified by Mr. R. B. Sibson, with Mrs. Sibson, N. Douglas, H. R. McKenzie and myself. They had a nest a few yards from the 1965 one, found on 6/1/68, in a different tree and they kept returning anxiously to it. The party had excellent views with binoculars and a very large telescope.



Taking the Craig nest as the focal point the nests located in the four years were:—

1964	Craig's Road, N47/175167 (1 inch to 1 mile)	
1965	Hull's, Taurangaruru, N47/190104	3 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles S. (of Craig's)
1966	Egan's, Whiri Whiri, N51/232080	5 $\frac{1}{8}$ " S.E.
1967	Allcock's, Taurangaruru, N47/212115	3 $\frac{3}{8}$ " S.E. by E.
1967	Hull's, Taurangaruru, N47/190104	3 $\frac{3}{4}$ " S.
1967	Gillatt's, Whiri Whiri, N51/224080	5 $\frac{1}{2}$ " S.E.

At 1630 hours on 7/10/67 H. R. McKenzie and I went to the Hull nest. Colin Hull reported that they had been about and calling as usual up to the evening of the 6th. I went to the nest site while H. R. McKenzie watched for 45 minutes from about 300 yards to check movements. No birds were seen or heard. I found a predated egg on the ground immediately below the nest. It was fresh, having a small amount of partly congealed yolk adhering to the inside of the shell. Three Mynas were about the site and others were near. A single oval hole in the small end of the egg measured 18 mm. x 14 mm. Owing to the hole the length could not be accurately determined but was approximately 39 mm. or more. The width was 29 mm.

We then went to Allcock's to look for the reported nest of 1967. I found it in the green top of a very high pine. On the ground immediately below it was the side, including the complete ends, of an egg, length 39, width 27. The shell was clean and white inside, possibly finally cleaned by insects, but it showed no sign of incubation.

The egg colour and pattern is according to Witherby. The sizes are above his measurements and those of Oliver. The shape is pyriform, a little less so than the White-fronted Tern's. The shells were retained.

The rather small hole in the Hull egg could indicate myna predation and the absence of nearly half of the Allcock one, perhaps magpie.

Further occurrences of the 1967-68 season were 14 October, 1967, two returned to Hull's; 7 November, two flew over N. Douglas's; 22 November, carrying twigs at W. Gillatt's, Whiri Whiri (N51/224080); 27 December, nest found at Gillatt's; 2 January, 1968, old nest found at Egan's; 12 March, two flying from Douglas's towards Allcock's.

Three birds were seen by Miss B. Hamilton, from March 1968 to early July, at Clyde Hamilton's farm (N47/168160). The third bird is thought to have been reared from an unlocated nest in the February-March period.

About 13/10/68, Con Egan found three birds and a nest being built on top of the old one. By November there was also a new nest. Two birds used the new nest and the odd bird sat on the old one at times. Magpies worried them. Mynas were not seen to interfere. All left the first week in December and appeared at C. Hull's trees. Up to 21 August 1969, sightings were made of one, two or three birds at a time on the properties of Clyde Hamilton, Colin Hamilton (N47/189131) and T. M. Dickey (N47/173183).

No reports of Rooks have been received from beyond the area described. Lack of breeding success is apparently due to persistent predation. Rooks nest in colonies where Magpies and Mynas dare not approach. These birds may have largely failed through not realising the danger, when breeding alone, of leaving their nest unattended.