

SOME NOTES ON SPOTLESS CRAKE

Spotless Crakes (*Porzana tabuensis*) frequent the swamps on our farm at Honikiwi. I first found a nest in January 1968. It was strongly built in dense vegetation, including raupo, sedge, manuka and rushes, and it was placed about two feet above the level of the water. Composed of dead fern fronds and grasses, it had a very shallow cup. In it were four mottled brown eggs, three of which were later hatched. When the first two had hatched I was able to handle the chicks while the parents watched close by. Next day the third egg had hatched. Always one of the parents was on guard near the nest; but after two days the family had moved away.

In January 1969, I heard and saw Spotless Crakes in a different place in the same swamp. They flew about as if they had a nest nearby, but I could not find it. When later I came across the nest, the birds had already hatched and gone.

In September 1969 I heard the crakes calling again. They were making a purring sound mainly in the evenings. They also make a sound like 'pook-pook' as in 'look.' I have also heard them uttering some surprisingly loud calls; as, for example, when one of a pair suddenly let out a call somewhat like an alarm clock going off and gradually running down.

The swamp in which they live is 10-15 yards across and meanders through rolling grassland with Spanish Heath, blackberry and manuka along the edges. I discovered that as long as I kept still, the crakes would pass within three or four feet of me. On the ground when not under cover they sometimes run two or three feet, then pause and quickly look around before running a few more feet. The crakes seldom seem to wade or swim, but prefer to walk along branches or rushes.

In this valley a series of dams has become choked with vegetation. Between the swamp and the rushes in one of the dams was a fallen willow. When coming from the swamp to feed in the dam the crakes would either walk at the water's edge and pass the foot of the tree or fly into the branches and walk along them just above water level and finish by flying into the rushes on the dam.

On 10 October 1970 I discovered a pair of Spotless Crakes in another larger swamp at some distance from the first pair. I found also several old nests fairly close together and I think some of them are cock nests.

One evening I noticed that there were several crakes coming from the swamp to feed; and some of them had whitish throats, which I have read are a sign of immaturity. One day one was seen feeding up a bank where blackberry had been cut and burnt and hay had been fed cut. I thought the crakes may have been eating grass seeds.

In January 1971 I found a pair with a nest placed at 4' 6" in raupo and containing one egg. On 13 January, when there were

three eggs, the birds started sitting. The eggs hatched on 31 January, i.e. after an incubation period of about 19 days which is rather shorter than the 22 or more given by Hadden (Notornis 17: 208), but is close to the figure given by Hindwood (Australian Birds in Colour, p. 22). In a spring nest also built about 4' 6" above water-level in a tangle of raupo and cutty-grass, three eggs hatched on 7 September. I now think that these crakes nest once in August-September and again about January. I have seen chicks crawling and swimming soon after they are hatched.

In all these swamps I now estimate that there are seven or eight pairs of Spotless Crakes.

EWEN FRASER

ORIENTAL CUCKOO ON LITTLE BARRIER ISLAND

All thirteen Auckland members who went to Little Barrier Island for Labour week-end (22-25 October 1971) saw this cuckoo (*Cuculus saturatus horsfieldi*). Many watched it for half an hour or more while it perched low in a puriri tree (*Vitex lucens*), occasionally flying down into the grass to take an insect then immediately returning to the same perch. It was first noticed as a "strange bird" by the Ranger's younger son (Bunny Wisnesky) on 20 October. Fresh to strong north to northwest winds blew from 19 to 22 October. Next day it rained steadily all day.

In description the bird closely follows that of the record from Kaihinu by P. Grant (Notornis 11 (2): 130) except in having no white tip to the tail and not moulting. One member (Alan Macdonald) heard it call quietly and described the call as a very regular 'Tsoo-tsoo-tsoo' repeated about a dozen times at approximately one-second intervals. The bird stayed on the 'flat,' i.e., comparatively open pasture land, and was not seen after 10 November 1971.

The last few days it spent in the Ranger's garden, becoming quite tame.

This is the first record of an Oriental Cuckoo on Little Barrier Island.

4 Mamaku Street,
Auckland, 5.

SYLVIA REED

THE COPULATION OF NEW ZEALAND FALCONS

On 22 October my colleague and I arose at dawn to begin our search for the actual nesting site of a pair of New Zealand Falcons (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) which we had been observing from a distance for a period of about six weeks. From our observations, these birds appeared to be preparing to nest somewhere in a clump of partly milled mixed podocarp-beech forest. Our observation point had been from a log loading ramp situated on the eastern side of the Mokomokonui River south of the Urewera National Park. The