

BIRD DISTRIBUTION MAPPING SCHEME

Last year's report (*Notornis* 18: 207-210) summarised progress from the completion of the feasibility trial in 1969 (*Notornis* 17: 231-235) until 30 March 1971. The present report, the third in the series, is limited to the eight months 1 May to 31 December 1971 so that future reports can cover a full calendar year.

As at 31 December 1971, a total of 4224 lists of species had been received and these covered 61% of the 1600 North Island squares (only 29% in April 1971) and 33% of the 2000 South Island ones (19% in April 1971). The lists were contributed by 278 observers. As in previous reports, the accompanying maps (Figs 1 and 2) serve two purposes: first, to show the scheme's progress towards the objective of a species list from every square in New Zealand and, second, to illustrate the distribution of some selected species as revealed by lists received to date. Figs 1 and 2 show all the squares from which lists had been received up to June 1972; some cards belonging to next year's report are included to give a more up-to-date indication of which squares still have to be covered.

A marked improvement in coverage was achieved in almost all parts of New Zealand during 1971-72. The improvement in the Wellington district, formerly poorly covered considering the several ornithologists who live there, is especially pleasing (as at 13 March 1972, lists were available from 152 of the 155 squares in the Wellington district — a 98% coverage, thanks largely to the energetic work of Dr J. A. Fowler). The North Island is now reasonably well covered except for some difficult country in the centre (Taranaki across to East Cape). A great deal of work still remains in the South Island where ornithologists are not only fewer and less evenly distributed, but have more squares to cover, many of them difficult to reach. The need for detailed information on the distribution of birds, particularly the rarer native species, has become urgent following recent proposals for changes in the commercial use of large areas of forest in the South Island; this provides a further opportunity for the Ornithological Society and government departments to cooperate in securing information of mutual interest.

While the improvement in the number of squares covered by bird lists is encouraging, there is no room for complacency. A report recently prepared by Dr J. A. Fowler lists the species so far recorded from each of the 155 squares in the Wellington district. The number of species noted per square varied from 5 to 50 with a mean of 20. Even allowing that the number of species recorded reflects the diversity of the habitat as well as the thoroughness of the survey, it is certain that many squares contain far more species than have yet been recorded from them. Clearly, many more lists are needed even from squares already marked as "covered"; areas of native forest, often

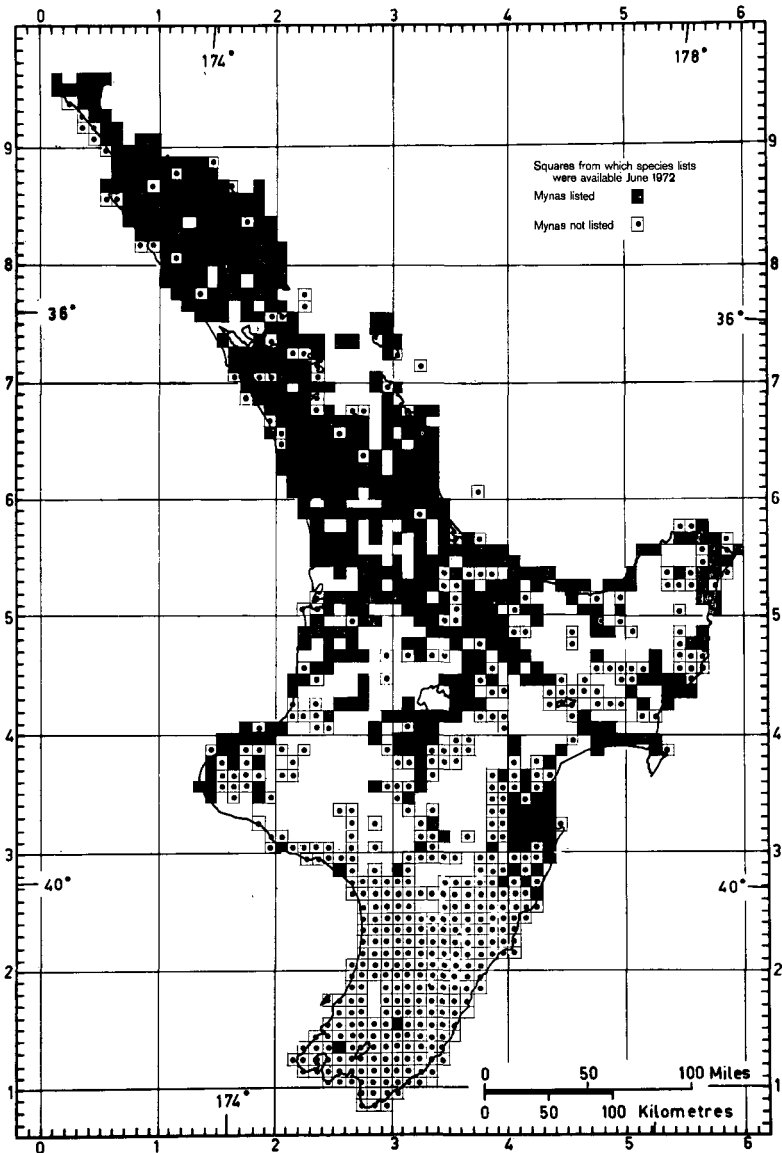


FIGURE 1: Distribution of Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*) in the North Island. Squares from which species lists are available are either shaded black (Mynas present) or have a central black dot (Mynas not listed); the remaining areas (white) are those from which species lists are not yet available. (Only two cards record Mynas in the South Island; see text.)

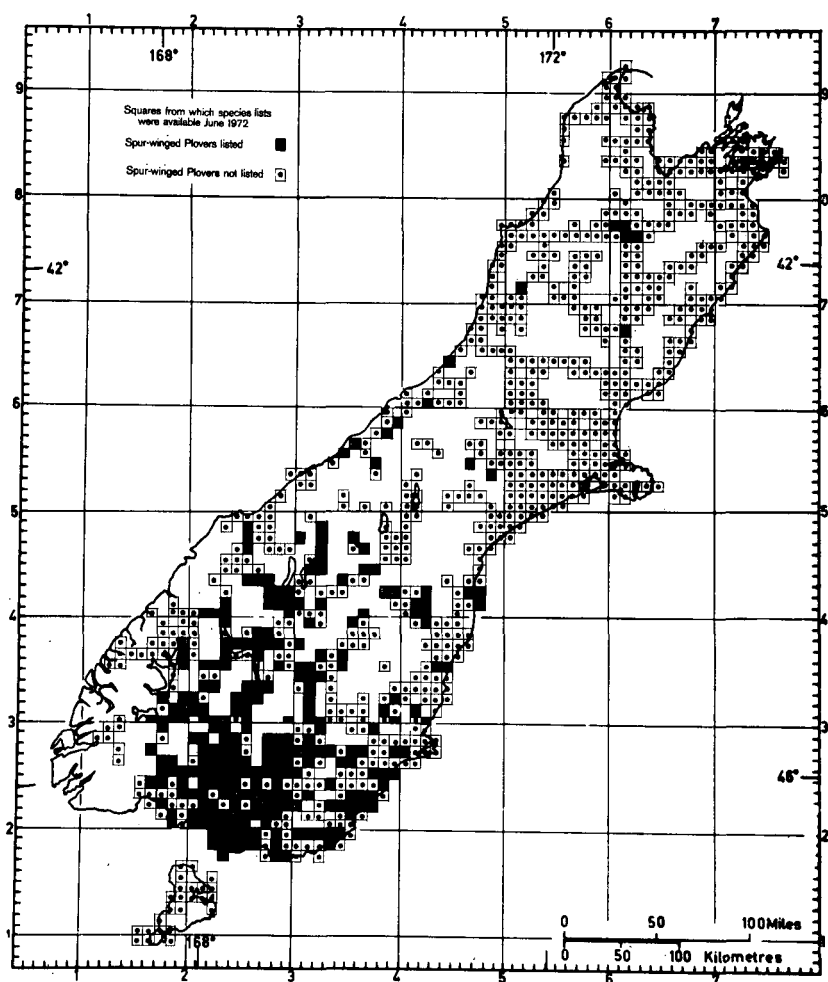


FIGURE 2: Distribution of Spur-winged Plovers (*Lobibyx novae-hollandiae*) in the South Island. Presence, seeming absence and 'no data' are indicated as in Fig 1. (Only one card reports a Spur-winged Plover in the North Island.)

less easily reached than roadside farmland, require particular attention.

Electronic data processing facilities are necessary before all the detailed information collected by the mapping scheme can be properly used. The value of the data is appreciated by government departments concerned with wildlife and, hopefully, some assistance will be forthcoming from the Government Computer Centre. Although negotiations to this end are in progress, they advance only slowly. In the meantime, the recording office has begun the task of transcribing data from the old cyclostyled forms, used in 1969-70, to the new printed cards; having only one type of card will greatly facilitate filing and storage of data.

This year's report differs from previous ones in that the maps show the distribution of two species of birds: the Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) in the North Island (Fig 1) and the Spur-winged Plover (*Lobibyx novaehollandiae*) in the South Island (Fig 2). To avoid confusion the maps exclude two records of Mynas from the South Island (one bird at East Taieri on 10/9/70 and three near Rakaia on 20/12/71), and one of a Spur-winged Plover in the North Island (a single bird resident at Waikanae, square N.2517). Mynas (Fig 1) are numerous and widely distributed in many districts north of Latitude 40°S, and especially so near townships and cultivated areas; they are rare in native forests except where roads and picnic spots provide openings. The reason for the virtual absence of Mynas in the southern quarter of the North Island, even in intensively cultivated areas, is not understood. The climate of, say, Manawatu can hardly be too cold for a bird that can flourish around Taupo and survive at Waiouru. The status of the Spur-winged Plover in New Zealand is described by other authors elsewhere in this issue. Any discrepancy between that detailed account and the distribution shown in Fig 2 probably results from the fact that Fig 2 contains only records supported by cards held by the Bird Mapping Scheme; records of Spur-winged Plovers, available from other sources, are excluded.

The authors wish to thank the many people who have contributed to the Mapping Scheme during the past year. Mr C. J. R. Robertson of the Wildlife Service (Department of Internal Affairs) provided information on computer services, the Cartographic Section of DSIR prepared Figs 1 and 2, Regional Representatives distributed and checked cards, and a great many people contributed skill, time and money in compiling birds lists from places out of town.

Dr P. C. Bull,

Mr P. D. Gaze,
Ecology Division,
DSIR,
P.O. Box 30-466,
Lower Hutt.