

## EAGLES IN NORTHLAND

On Saturday, 25 March 1972, Mr Leon Kernot of Kaitaia was travelling by car, with a friend from Australia, up the Ninety Mile Beach. About half a mile south of Hukatere Hill they came upon a large bird of prey just finishing a meal of sea gull which it had apparently killed. The bird did not rise until approached to within some thirty or forty feet and, hence, they had a good view of it. The bird was at least two or three times as large as a Harrier, very dark brown on the back, paler on the under body, and the legs were clothed with feathers right down to the feet. The wing-span was estimated to be about six feet, and before being disturbed on the beach the bird stood very erect.

About two weeks later, on 10 April, Mr Ron Hopkins, a crayfisherman and skipper of the boat *Wainoni*, saw what was apparently the same bird on the Cape Maria Van Diemen island off the mainland, the distance from the first sighting being about 40 to 50 miles. The details supplied by Mr Hopkins (including a report in the *Northland Age* that: "The bird appeared to have a six foot wing span and to be light brown on part of its plumage with a dirty yellow front and feathered legs") were much the same as those given by Mr Kernot and would suggest that the bird could possibly be the Wedge-tailed Eagle of Australia, judging by the coloured figure given in the 8th edition of Leach's "Australian Bird Book" (Leach 1944: fig. 158 (opp. p. 29)). These are not the first sightings of strange birds of prey since another was observed by several people around Kaitaia a little over a year ago and seemed to answer the description of a Peregrine although I did not see it myself. Both of the recent eagle sightings were reported in the local paper and Press Association messages have also appeared in other papers (e.g. *The Evening Post* in Wellington).

## REFERENCES

- EVENING POST, 1972. Australian eagle in NZ? *The Evening Post* [Wellington], 30 March 1972: 1.
- LEACH, J. 1944. *An Australian bird book*. 8th ed. (rev. and ed. by C. Barrett). Pp. 1-200, illus. Melbourne: Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd.
- NORTHLAND AGE, 1972a. Big bird may have been eagle. *Northland Age*, 41 (48), 28 March 1972: 1.
- NORTHLAND AGE, 1972b. "Eagle" on island off Cape Maria. *Northland Age* 41 (51), 11 April 1972: 1.

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