

Another indication of the decrease of the Pipit in the Wairarapa Valley is provided by records of roadside nests discovered when the sitting bird flew out on the approach of traffic. Eighteen nests were found in this way from 1935 to 1952, eleven of these being up to 1939, four in the 1940-1949 decade and three in the fifties to 1952, since when not a single roadside nest has been recorded nor has the bird itself been seen on these roads. The roads in question are: Weraiti Hill, Ngaumu, Gladstone, Cavelands, Te Whiti, Maungaraki, Rangitumau, Te Wharau (Hikorangi).

At present a few Pipits inhabit the Ruamahanga and other riverbeds but here, too, there has been a decrease in numbers. At Te Whiti, for instance, where formerly, 1937 to 1951, several were usually seen on or near the riverbed, now most visits fail to record the bird at all. The Pipit is sparingly distributed on the hilltops of the East Coast pastoral lands and along the sea beaches, perhaps most numerous in the latter areas. It has remained in small numbers on the Rimutaka Hill Highway.

Since the sealing of main roads, with an ever-increasing volume of motor traffic and faster speeds, it is likely that the habit of the Pipit in flying from its nest across the road in front of approaching vehicles has proved a fatal one. This, combined with the almost universal practice of Government and local bodies of spraying road verges for weed control, with consequent contamination of water tables; the greater destruction of roadside vegetation to improve visibility; more efficient farming methods and the increase of the Magpie which unfortunately is prone to snap up young birds found in its foraging in the Pipit's habitat have all contributed, it seems likely, to the decrease in the number of this ecologically valuable bird.

It should be stated that bird life generally in the Wairarapa has decreased considerably in the period under review to about only a quarter of its former numbers. The decrease has been particularly noticeable since the Second World War. Has a similar decrease in the numbers of the Pipit been recorded in other parts of New Zealand?

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#### A FIJI BLACK-FACED SHRIKEBILL ANTING WITH A MILLIPEDE

On 11 November 1972, in rainforest about 300 metres above sea-level in southern Viti Levu, Fiji Islands, I saw a female Black-faced Shrikebill (*Clytorhynchus nigrogularis*) apparently "anting" with a millipede.

The bird was perched, low in the understorey, holding a small millipede (approx. 3cm long) crosswise in her bill. She repeatedly thrust her head under her wing and shook it about, as if preening violently. She then withdrew her head, thrust it under the other wing, and again shook it about. After she had done this several times she leant forward and transferred the millipede to her feet, holding it along the branch on which she was perched, and poking roughly at it with her bill. After several jabs she again took it cross-wise in her bill and recommenced thrusting it under one wing then the other.

This basic pattern was repeated three times, the shrikebill dropping the millipede into tangled undergrowth the third time she lifted it from her feet. She looked down at the spot where it fell, but made no attempt to retrieve it, and after a few seconds flew off through the forest, followed by a male Black-faced Shrikebill which had been preening and calling on a vine a few metres away.

Unfortunately I was unable to find the millipede amongst the dense tangle of fern into which it had fallen, so cannot offer an identification.

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#### WASP STINGING A BELLBIRD

In early March 1973 on Hen Island I observed a juvenile Bellbird (*Anthornis melanura*) fall to the ground and lie there with very little movement. When I picked it up I observed a Tasmanian Wasp (*Polistes humilis*) stinging the bird on the right side of its rump. The bird was very drowsy but after being fed some honey water began to recover. Some ten minutes later it was looking quite bright but examination showed that its right side, particularly the leg, was still partially paralysed. However, half an hour after being rescued the bird had recovered sufficiently to fly away.

Dr J. C. Watt, Entomology Division, DSIR, Auckland, who identified the wasp for me added the following notes —

“It was apparently accidentally introduced from Australia and has been in the North Island for some years. The nest is a small inverted cone of greyish paper attached to the branches of trees or shrubs. Generally this wasp will only attack man when provoked. Thus, one would imagine that the Bellbird must have provoked it in some way.”

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