

## LABOUR WEEKEND SCHOOL

### 24 to 27 October 1975

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A cold winter-like evening greeted the first arrivals on Friday night. However, cold often accompanies fine weather and Saturday was no exception as twenty-one visitors plus four local members headed for the coast in beautiful sunshine. The Kaituna Lagoon was first on the programme and here we were joined by Roy Weston with other Bay of Plenty members. Alas, it was not the Kaituna's best day; the place was alive with nesting Pied Stilts but little else until just as we were leaving and we spotted a lone Knot and a very tame Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.

Tony Palliser then led us to the upper part of Little Waihi Estuary where a treat lay in store for us in the shape of two Glossy Ibis and a Little Egret. Also present were Godwits, a Golden Plover and Caspian Terns. If this was not enough the return to our cars gave us a White Ibis surrounded by Grey Teal, Shoveller Duck and Mallards.

That evening Kelly Rennell gave a fascinating talk, backed by excellent slides, on the birds and animals he had observed while stationed on Campbell Island engaged on meteorological work.

On Sunday the scheduled forest survey at Waioatapu was abandoned owing to wet weather so a trip to Lake Rerewhakaaitu was made instead. Even the ducks found it too wet although we did see Dabchick, Scaup, Shoveller and Mallard ducks as well as seven Caspian Terns and a large flock of Black-billed Gulls.

Before lunch we did manage a short stop in Waioatapu Forest and heard, but did not see, Long-tailed Cuckoos. We ate at the old forest village site which, without houses, has a park-like appearance. Tuis and Bellbirds were attracted by the waratah trees. Having eaten, the party walked round the beautiful Echo Lake with its thermally-coloured waters which greatly improved the light for observing the families of Grey Teal and Grey Duck which swam across the waters. Several members saw their first Whiteheads and Tomtits; Robins did not appear unfortunately.

A dash was then made to the Ngongotaha Trout Hatchery where we were shown all the stages of development. Of considerable interest were some penned waterfowl which included some Australian Black Ducks.

That evening the Wilcox home was opened to an enjoyable buffet meal where friends, old and new, were able to exchange ornithological gossip.

4 a.m. next morning saw us heading for the coast again bent on seeing Marsh Crakes. Half the party went to Te Teko and were successful while the rest met no success at Matata; some Fern Birds were seen though and provided new species for some members. Both groups then headed for Rotoma where the Kokakos turned on a star performance. Good views of Bitterns were also had at nearby Soda Springs. The second group tried again for crakes at Rotongata but the elusive birds were heard more than seen and these were only Spotless Crakes.

Goodbyes were finally said at the Blue Lake Camp and the school came to an end.

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## SHORT NOTE

### INEXPERIENCED HUNTING BEHAVIOUR BY AN AUSTRALASIAN HARRIER

On 18 January, a fine evening, I was lying down in a flat rough paddock beside a trained native falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) being used for research. The falcon looked up from feeding and I turned and noticed a Harrier (*Circus approximans*) about 400 metres away. The Harrier, a young bird, probably female, was flying steadily towards us searching the area below. About 30 metres from us she broke her flight and started circling over something without noticing me lying quietly. She circled with legs dangling, almost landing several times and interested in something in the shortish rough grass.

I sat up slowly to get a better view and saw to my surprise that she was circling over my black cocker spaniel bitch who was snuffling around after mice. The dog, being used to trained hawks flying about, was oblivious to the Harrier a metre or so over her back.

Eventually the hawk landed about two metres from the dog. The dog glanced up at the hawk which promptly took off in fright. After circling once more the hawk flew across the paddock and landed on the top of a 5 metre sawn-off pine windbreak, another sign of inexperience.

Judging by the date and the bird's immaculate plumage, she was in the process of becoming independent. This is the period when a lot of hawks run into difficulties. I have had experience of trained Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and Goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*) attacking pointers and springer spaniels but I would not have expected such behaviour from a Harrier.

N. C. FOX