

## SHORT NOTES

### BEHAVIOUR OF BIRDS WHEN ATTACKED BY NEW ZEALAND FALCONS

On 21 August 1975 I was working with a group in the Matea area of Kaingaroa Forest when we had the following interesting observation. We were at a compartment that had been cultivated prior to planting which had proved attractive to Skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*) and had just had lunch when a Falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) flew over. Almost at once it saw the larks and flew towards one. The lark took off in time to dodge the first rush and started a gentle climb with the hawk in full pursuit. As the hawk had the advantage of speed it made several more passes at the lark, but without success. At this stage the lark started to sing and as it came over us found a thermal which enabled it to start a spiral climb. The falcon, although still chasing, was obviously tiring and starting to fall behind so at this stage banked away leaving the lark. On 18 September I saw another similar chase at Goudies Block near Kaingaroa. Again a falcon was chasing a lark and the bird must have used the same tactics to evade the hawk as they were high above the field. On 27 August Messrs G. Brunnsden and P. Bowles were out at Matea again at a similar compartment to the former one and close by. They had two dogs with them which attracted a falcon; the bird flew round above the animals until a N.I. Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa placabilis*) flew out of a monoa bush and across to the group. The falcon immediately tried to catch the fantail by diving at it. The fantail dodged the attack and flew off close to the ground. The falcon made repeated attacks by rising to about 6 m then diving at the fantail; this chase continued until the birds disappeared over a hill. Soon after this the hawk returned to sit in a nearby monoa bush. The outcome of the chase was not known.

The above observations caused me to remember another falcon episode in my garden. This took place in September 1962 when my lawn had been recently sown in grass seed. As usual this attracted House Sparrows and Yellowhammers. One morning while eating breakfast I saw the feeding sparrows suddenly scattered by the sudden rush of a falcon. The sparrows made for the fence and landed in the holes of the large wire netting while the hawk had landed on the top where it looked down at the sparrows below. The sparrows continued to look up at the hawk until it tried to dive down at them. This appeared to be what the sparrows had been waiting for as they immediately flew out the other side to safety.

RAYMOND JACKSON

9 Kenrick Road,  
Rotorua