

On 27 September 1975, to check for the presence of falcons, I went to Round Bush (NZMS1 N148/800248) and saw at least two birds as well as several Australasian Harriers (*Circus approximans*), flying and calling above the forest. Round Bush (Esler & Greenwood 1968, *Bull. Wellington Bot. Soc.* 35: 3-7) is a remnant of semi-swamp vegetation with tall forest dominated by kahikatea (*Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*) and pukatea (*Laurelia novaezelandiae*). It covers 50 ha and is the largest of only a few remnants in the area, the nearest major tract of forest being on the Tararua Ranges about 22 km to the east.

It appears likely that the bush was serving as a roost for the falcons in an area not otherwise providing suitable retreats. The sand-country is noted for its abundance of finches (Falla 1957) so that ample food would have been available. The *Field Guide* (Falla, Sibson & Turbott 1970) mentions that young birds wander over farmland in autumn, but these observations were in spring. That the species may sometime breed at Round Bush remains an exciting possibility.

Apart from the falcons on the one occasion, and despite many visits to the area at all times of year, I have seen no native birds at Round Bush or in its vicinity other than those common throughout the coastal Manawatu; namely Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*), Grey Warbler (*Gerygone igata*), Silvereye (*Zosterops lateralis*), Kingfisher (*Halcyon sancta*), Shining Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx lucidus*), Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo tahitica neoxena*), Pukeko (*Porphyrio melanotus*), White-faced Heron (*Ardea novaehollandiae*) and Harrier. This paucity of native species doubtlessly reflects the transformation of indigenous habitats into farmland, and provides circumstantial evidence for the inability of many native species to persist in a small and isolated remnant.

BRIAN J. GILL, *Department of Zoology, University of Canterbury, Christchurch*



WASHING OF FOOD BY SPOTLESS CRAKE

While observing Spotless Crake (*Porzana tabuensis plumbea*) in a swamp in Waiuku State Forest on 24 May 1975, I noticed a feeding technique which I had not seen this species use before.

A bird, attracted by my taped calls, dropped into shallow water from among the leaves of raupo (*Typha angustifolia*) with a caterpillar in its bill. It was about 2.5 m away from me.

The head was then lowered, until part of the bill and the caterpillar were submerged, and moved vigorously from side to side, causing a splash. The bird repeated this washing action twice, swallowed the caterpillar, then quickly disappeared in the raupo, giving two very soft "mook" calls (Hadden, *Notornis* 17 (3): 200-213) as it did so. This observation was made on a cold, dull, showery day and lasted about a minute. The crakes had been generally active.

I. W. JOHNSON, *Maio, R.D. 2, Waiuku*