

Reef Heron (*Egretta sacra*) — at various places round the coast, but only the grey phase seen. One bird was disturbed 1 km beyond the end of the road up the Avana Valley (6 km inland) and flew further upstream.

Wandering Tattler (*Tringa incana*) — three in Ngatangiia Harbour.

White Tern (*Gygis alba*) — two birds near Ngatangiia and one near Titikaveka.

Pacific Pigeon (*Ducula pacifica*) — heard in the forest south of the Needle.

Rarotongan Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus rarotongensis*) — one bird near a waterfall, Avana stream.

Long-tailed Cuckoo (*Eudynamis taitensis*) — one bird in forest remnant near Ngatangiia.

Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) — common everywhere in the coastal cultivated country.

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### THE CIRL BUNTING IN MARLBOROUGH

The Cirl Bunting (*Emberiza cirrus*) in the Ward district of Marlborough is common but not conspicuous. Its size, manner of flight and its inconspicuous colouring, particularly of the female, do not make it easy to find. Since its size is about that of the Yellowhammer and Greenfinch, it is difficult to pick out at a distance when there are so many birds present of similar size. The manner of flight is almost the same as a Yellowhammer's but with a slightly more dipping flight just before settling.

From October through summer to April, male birds are easily located by their clicking or rattling call. Calling is usually from a tree but often from such high places as power wires and poles. I have not heard them calling from the ground but have seen one call from a Matagouri bush less than a metre high. In this district the calling of males may be heard occasionally from about mid-August, slowly increasing to regular calling by the end of October. The most consistent times for calling are early morning and late afternoon to dusk. Calls may be uttered up to nine times a minute. Calling seems to be territorial but the first bird calling in September 1977 appeared to have no mate so that his early start may have been to attract a female. From my general observation, males seem to remain spread on their territories throughout the year.

Other calls of the Cirl Bunting are a very high-pitched *see* from a bird that is perched, apparently unoccupied; also a contact chatter when adults are attending juveniles that have left the nest.

Increased sightings in August of three or four birds in a group seem to be normal, though I do not know why this is so. The largest group I have seen was of six males and five females on 19 September 1977.

The Cirl Bunting mixes with Yellowhammer much less often than is often thought. It seems that their association is only by chance, when Yellowhammers happen to be feeding in their area. Cirl Buntings may then join them, fly off with them but apparently not stay long with them. Several times I have seen a Cirl Bunting feeding with Yellowhammers or a mixed flock of small birds and move off with them, only to find later that the Cirl Bunting has returned to the same spot.

Calling sometimes resembles the first part of the Yellowhammer's call. One particular male at the end of the 1976-77 summer would give four or five calls similar to a Yellowhammer and then continue with the rattling or clicking sounds. The rattling or clicking sound is much like part of a Greenfinch's song.

On two occasions I have seen fighting males, once on 29 August 1971 and the other date not recorded. I was attracted by their excited rattle calls; both birds were close enough to be almost touching and flying vertically, face to face. They rose to about 5 m, calling strongly, then dropped away in different directions.

The earliest I have seen juveniles out of the nest and attended by adults has been on 14 December. Nesting in this district is in December, January and February. The lowest nest I have seen was at one metre in a briar bush; the highest at 5 m in a macrocarpa tree. Eggs are from two to four per nest and include an infertile egg more often than other birds, in my experience. Other birds' nests are sometimes used either as a base or just by adding a small amount of lining. I suspect that of the two high nests, one at 4 m was of a Greenfinch, the other at 5 m was an old Song Thrush or Blackbird nest. A pair this summer used an old thrush's nest which was at least one year old as a base. A filler lining of moss and a final lining of fine grass and a little hair was used. Nests are sometimes built in sites ranging from thick bush to quite open pine trees. A nest built completely by Cirl Buntings is loosely constructed but not unduly untidy and is lined with horse or cow hair, sometimes a lot and sometimes only a small amount around the inside. The nests I have found have all been close to a patch of long grass such as on a road side, but this may well be coincidental as there is a lot of long grass about anyway. Both female and male bring food to the nest. The only food taken to the nest which I have recognised has been caterpillars and a moth.

I have twice seen a cock bird feeding on the seed of Barley Grass. He ate some without taking the seed head from the plant and some by nipping the seed-head off and then taking the riper seeds from each head. The seed, which was still in a fairly soft stage, was not swallowed but nipped several times, probably to get the soft inside.

This district has a lot of Barley Grass but I have not seen other species feeding on the seed.

Although I am most familiar with the Ward to Seddon area of Marlborough, I have found the Cirl Bunting fairly common from the Ure River to Blenheim and in some parts up to at least ten miles inland. I have not seen any in the Wairau Valley or from the Ure to Clarence Bridge but these should be suitable areas also. I have seen many more birds in the last five or six years but this probably reflects my improved ability to recognise them rather than a marked increase in their numbers. Through the main area of Ward, I would estimate conservatively there are two male Cirl Buntings per square mile. On our farm of approximately two square miles there were at least 12 calling males in the 1976-77 season. The average rainfall is 28 inches per year, with moderate to hard frosts in winter and summers usually very dry with fire restrictions from about Christmas to the end of February.

The areas which appear to suit the Cirl Bunting are open pasture with hedges or trees, and hilly country with scattered trees or gully scrub, through to quite rough country. I have seen them from sea level to about 300 metres.

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#### BREEDING OF AUSTRALIAN LITTLE GREBE

A pair of Australian Little Grebe (*Podiceps novaehollandiae*) bred on the West Coast of the South Island in 1978, apparently without final success.

The site was a small pond at about 230 m a.s.l. on the Bell Hill State Farm, about 28 km east of Greymouth and about 10 km north of Rotomanu. The pond is about 100 m long by 60 m wide and is said to be no more than 2 m deep. It is surrounded by developed farm land. Reeds cover most of the west bank from the northwest corner to the southwest corner, and a few gorse bushes grow on the mostly clear and steeper east bank.

The adult grebes were first reported by Mr R. Webber of the West Coast Acclimatisation Society to DPM, who studied them on 28 February and 1 March. Description: bill black, eye yellow, pale yellow stripe from bill to eye, top of head and front of neck dark grey to black, face paler grey, back of neck chestnut brown, chest pale grey, back smoky grey, under tail white, some pale brown towards rear of sides. The birds were actively swimming and diving but one frequently disappeared for up to an hour at a time. A faint *cheep-cheep* was heard once.

On 12 March, CSL found that there were two small chicks, thought to be about two days old. They were dark brown or black and were seen both on the back of one of the adults and swimming independently. Their *peep-peep-peep* call was strong but that of the