

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.

T. J. TAYLOR, P.O. Box 22, Ward



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

adults was quite soft, reminiscent of the *click* call of the Fernbird (*Bowdleria punctata*).

The nest, made of reeds and water weeds, was found about 5 m out into the water. It was presumably a floating platform with no visible attachment to other plants or dead wood in the water. It was devoid of cover and was easily seen.

On 19 March, the chicks, now seen by CSL to be a rich brown, were spending much of their time on their parents' backs where they stayed during dives, although sometimes coming up alone. On 25 March, the chicks were seen by Ulrich Walthert to be diving on their own and the adults to be aggressive to Paradise Shelduck (*Tadorna variegata*). By 2 April, however, one chick had disappeared, cause of death unknown, perhaps Harrier (*Circus approximans*) or eel. The remaining chick now had light markings on the head and whitish on the rump and under-tail areas. The adults were heard to call *cheuk-cheuk* eight or ten times rapidly as they approached each other. On 9 April, the chick, now about half grown, had a yellow bill, a mottled, dark brown crown, white with dark markings on the neck, and a very light brown general body colour. Both adults were feeding it and it was also diving itself.

The local duck-shooting season began on 15 April. On 16 April, only one adult was present. The chick was calling frequently and demanding to be fed, and diving for up to 10 seconds at a time. It had a yellow bill, dark brown crown and back of neck, white on face and breast, pale greyish-brown body.

On 22 April, no grebes were present. The chick would almost certainly not have been ready to fly and the real fate of the birds is not known.

C. S. LAUDER, 9 Winnie Street, Greymouth; D. P. MURRAY, Wildlife Service, Dept. of Internal Affairs, 144 Jollie Street, Hokitika

[Colour photos of adult and 5-week-old chick leave no doubt as to identity. — Ed.]



YELLOWHEAD NOT ENTIRELY INSECTIVOROUS

Since all the literature points to the fact that the Yellowhead (*Mohoua chrocephala*) lives solely on a diet of invertebrates (e.g. the Field Guide says 'so far as is known entirely insectivorous'), the following observation may be of interest.

In the early afternoon of 16 April 1978, halfway down the track (in mixed silver beech/red beech forest) between the Routeburn Falis and Routeburn Flats huts, I was attracted by a noisy party of about eight Yellowheads. Initially they were feeding among epiphytes on trunks and branches at about sub-canopy level but, in response to