

SHORT NOTE

The feeding of New Zealand Kingfisher chicks

I was interested to read the article by Lynley Marie Hayes on *Behaviour of New Zealand Kingfishers feeding chicks* in Vol. 38, Part 1, of *Notornis*.

The author asks and answers several questions relating to the feeding of the chicks and my own observations may be of interest. These were made from hides at 23 nest sites, which ranged in location from forest habitats, open country and swamps, to marine locations. Most of these nest sites were in North Auckland and some in the South Island. I consider the variety of food items depends largely on the location of the nest site. The food taken to chicks in nests in forest habitats consisted mainly of insects, especially cicadas; also freshwater crayfish from forest streams, and skinks. On two occasions the chicks were fed birds. Chicks in nests in open country habitats received insects, caterpillars, tadpoles, earthworms, small fish, skinks and the occasional mouse.

In marine locations chicks were fed small fish, shrimps and mud crabs.

I have photographic evidence to support the feeding of various insects, including German wasps and large dragonflies, tadpoles, earthworms, spiders, fish, freshwater crayfish, skinks, mice and small birds (Silvereyes).

All items were fed whole. Large items were always presented to the chicks head first and whole. Apart from the prey being bashed on a branch to render it supple, no attempt was made to tear the prey apart.

I have noticed a correlation between the age of chicks and the size of food given to them. Very small chicks receive small insects, caterpillars, earthworms and small fish. However, it is surprising to see what a large item a small chick can swallow.

The frequency of feeding appears to vary with time of day. Early in the day chicks are fed at frequent intervals, often every 4 or 5 minutes. During the heat of day in mid-summer periods of over an hour may elapse between feeds.

Newly fledged chicks are fed very frequently during the first few hours after leaving the nest.

In six nests, when I was able to determine the incubation and hatching periods accurately, I found that the first chick left the nest 26 days after hatching, others following over the next 20 hours.

Although New Zealand Kingfishers are considered to be aggressive to other bird species, I have noted three instances where kingfishers have been evicted from nests by Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*).

In one nest under study, 5 eggs were eaten and remains scattered below the tree and mynas were in occupation. In this instance the mynas were eliminated and the kingfishers successfully renested. Two other Kingfisher nests, one in a dead tree and another in a roadside clay bank, were taken over by mynas.

GEOFF MOON, P.O. Box 60-175, Titirangi, Auckland 7