recently observed whimbrels at Lord Howe Island, was able to see the diagnostic pale rump of **variegatus** when the bird flew away from him, and this character was amply confirmed on October 30.

Northern Hemisphere waders on migration in New Zealand usually feed or rest on broad sand and mudflats or banks, offering little cover to the photographer. The whimbrel has not previously been caught by a New Zealand camera, and even the godwit, commonest of migrant waders, has seldom, if ever, been photographed feeding naturally. The accompanying pictures were taken at Petone on October 30 with an "Exacta," fitted with 6-inch lens.

NORTH ISLAND THRUSH.

By W. P. Mead, Wanganui.

The writer spent four days, March 14 to 17, 1950, on the Wanganui River with a survey party. The Maori captain of the boat, Andrew Anderson, has been 40 years on the river, and is a man with a real love of the native birds and bush. When in conversation with him regarding birds that we might see on the trip, I learned that a bird he called the "toatoa," apparently the native thrush, was present in the bush alongside the river. The bird was known also to Mr. R. Oxley, a younger Maori member of the party, educated at Te Aute College, to whom I am indebted for information on the correct spelling and usage of the Maori names for the thrush, he having had these confirmed by an elderly Maori of Koroniti.

Most of the following information was given me by Anderson before we heard and saw the bird, but information given later by both men is included. The common name of the North Island thrush, along the river, is "toatoa," but Anderson had been told by his elder brother that its correct name is "tiutiu," or tiutiukata." The addition of the word "kata" to "tiutiu" is used when it is desired to better describe the bird (just as we use "thrush" or, more particularly, "song thrush," for the introduced bird). Anderson first noticed the toatoa along the reaches of the river below Retaruke about 12 or 14 years ago, that is, not long before the tourist service on that part of the river was discontinued owing to the war. He described it as a brown bird the size of the introduced thrush, or slightly larger, inquisitive and tame, yet in a way shy. It would often appear when a wild pig was killed, but on noticing that it had been observed, would fly away, frequently returning and flying past for one more look before going away altogether. It feeds on the ground as well as on the trees, sings somewhat like the introduced thrush, and has a way of turning its head to one side, listening, then to the other side and listening again. It appears to be increasing in numbers and extending its range alongside the river.

The noise of the boat's engine prevented us from hearing bird calls, but on March 15, near Opuraha, when we were alongside the bank with the engine idling (we were picking up a pig which had been shot from the boat) I heard a call, new to me, from a tree not 20 feet away, which Anderson said, before I had time to question him about it, was the call of the toatoa. We could not see the bird and as we were running late, could not wait on the chance of finding it. The call heard on this occasion was the first two phrases of the thrush's song as I heard it later, on March 17. There was a good deal of noise and I could not hear more.

We tied up for the night at Te Auroa. Soon after daylight on March 16, during the bustle of getting ready for an early start, we heard more calls, double whistles and chirping calls, which Anderson said were from the toatoa. There seemed to be two or more of the birds only a chain or two away in the bush, but again there was no time to investigate.

Returning downstream, after reaching Retaruke, we pulled in after dark that night above Otaahua. On the morning of March 17 the song of the toatoa was heard again. There was one singing across the river,

while on our side there were probably two or more, not far away up the steep hillside. This time it was possible for Mr. O. D. Bell and myself to take an hour ashore without delaying the party. A somewhat difficult scramble took us to some tawa trees on a very steep dry spur, where the birds appeared to be feeding (probably on grubs) in the moss on the big limbs of the trees. We saw the thrush on two different trees, but could not be certain that the second bird seen when returning may not have been the same bird that we saw further up, as it could have turned back out of sight and commenced feeding again behind us. In addition to fleeting glimpses as the birds worked along the limbs almost hidden by intervening leaves, I saw the birds perching twice, at about 25 and 20 feet distance, and three times flying, distant 20 feet and less. In addition, Mr. Bell had a view of one bird when perching and singing, so clear that he remarked that he could see its bill moving as it sang.

There was the usual difficulty in distinguishing colour and small markings that one has in looking up against the light at birds in shade in the bush. But we had clear views of the principal features of the bird, size, shape, dark and light parts, etc. Its size we estimated by comparison with well-known birds; about the size of a blackbird, or distinctly larger than a bell-bird, and smaller than a tui; a longer bird for its girth than the common thrush. Once only the lighting allowed me to get an impression of brown colour. The upper parts of head and back appeared very dark; the underside of the bird when perching in deep shade showed dark head, white throat, grey breast and abdomen, very light on lower part of abdomen, and dark tail. The shape of the tail was particularly noticed as the bird dived down and soared up again "for a last look at us" as Anderson said, when we told him of it. The end of the tail appeared somewhat forked, but the two "prongs" with rounded, not sharp, ends. Besides intermittent calls, the birds stopped feeding from time to time, to sing once through, a song of five, or occasionally, six phrases. The first and fifth phrases were the same, a loud sweet-toned note repeated about six times. In the intermediate three phrases, three other notes were used, a lower note, a very high note, and a chirping note, but one note only, repeated about six times, was used in each phrase. These five phrases were, therefore, of equal length. The sixth phrase, if added, was shorter, either two or four notes, or the double whistle previously mentioned, sometimes repeated.

Later on the same day the call was heard again at Upper Mangapapa. This was the fourth place at which it was heard along 16 miles of the river, the straight line distance between the lower and upper places being ten miles. As nothing could be heard above the noise of the engine when the boat was moving, it is evident that there must have been many times the number of birds calling than those we heard. On returning to Wanganui we examined the specimens of North Island thrush in the museum and satisfied ourselves that our identification of the birds was correct.

The following is Mr. Bell's independent account of the bird as seen and heard by him:—

On the night of March 16 we camped at the first bend up stream from the Otaahua rapid on the right bank of the Wanganui River. We heard the toatoa calling from daylight on Friday, March 17. The term "toatoa" is a name used by the captain of the river boat to describe this particular bird. It is undoubtedly a misnomer, toatoa being the Maori name of the mountain tanekaha. We had heard the same call on the previous day at Te Auroa, where we camped on Wednesday night. The note or call was identified by Mr. R. Oxley and Mr. Anderson, the captain of the river boat, both of whom have had a lifetime of experience in the bush in the Wanganui River region. On the morning of Friday, March 17, Mr. W. Mead and I climbed the ridge adjacent to our camping place and followed the call. The bird was

finally located in a mossy tawa tree and appeared to be feeding on the grubs, etc., in the moss. I saw it distinctly from a distance of about 20 feet, but it was against the light and I could not be sure of the colour except that it was a dark coloured bird. The bird was facing me and had a fairly large yellowy white marking below the breast about at the abdomen. Shortly afterwards it flew away and in flight it appeared to have a longish tail and flew with a swooping flight. I should say that the size of the bird would be between that of the ordinary thrush and the blackbird. It was definitely larger than the thrush. The song was very like that of the ordinary thrush—very clear and consisted of several distinct notes. I saw the bird between 8 a.m. and 8.30 a.m. The morning was clear and sunny and visibility was good. From the calls, there appeared to be several of these birds in the locality and also, judging by the calls we heard previously, they appear to be fairly well established on the river reaches between Mangapurua and Wade's Landing. Anderson said that these birds are showing up near Pipiriki. According to him, the appearance of the "toatoa" on the Wanganui River is recent—only within the last few years. We could not see detailed markings of the bird, which was feeding in the centre of the tree and only came out to the edge where I saw it, preparatory to flying away. I have since examined the specimen of the North Island thrush in the Wanganui Museum and I am satisfied that it is identical with the toatoa observed at Otaahua and described above."

The following are the latest dates I have of the North Island thrush being seen in other parts of this same forest, which extends from the Wanganui River area westward to the farm lands of Taranaki:—By Mr. G. W. Topp, at Upper Waitotara, about 1896, and inland from Patea, in 1922 or 1923 (after killing a pig); by Mr. Butler, near Koroniti, in 1917; an unconfirmed report from the Whangamomona district, in 1930. From the several references to the bird coming when a wild pig was killed, it appears that it is attracted by any unusual loud noise in the bush, but from our observations it seems to take considerable care when perched to get a view out, to keep itself in shade or partly hidden.

Both Mr. Bell and I feel that considering that so little is known of the native thrush someone with much more time to spare than we had should undertake a study of the bird as soon as possible. We believe that we could find a fairly easy way in to the area where it now is, and that there should be no difficulty in finding the birds when in song. But we have no information regarding possible seasonal migrations or silent periods, so that a search at a different season might produce no results.

VISIT TO RETARUKE, MAY, 1950.

On May 8, Mr. J. Moreland and I arrived at Retaruke to investigate the possibility of travelling overland into the area where the thrush was present in March. The start of the route on the east side of the river appeared too difficult for fast travelling, but on May 9, by crossing to the west, we were able to reach the most northerly point at which the thrush had been heard in March, and where it was seen. The birds were not calling, or perhaps had moved either downstream or away from the river. Owing to the rough nature of the country we could not have continued much further downstream and returned before dark, nor were we prepared for camping, so explored the spurs back from the river, without hearing the bird.

On the following two days, in addition to another walk downstream, we went upstream and also up a branch valley, since there might be some possibility of the bird being present in bush near to roads or tracks. The bird was not heard, and as it is not known to local settlers, it is probable that the point at which it was seen on March 17 marks the northern limit of its present habitat in the river valley. Whether it moves about or is silent at times, and therefore, almost impossible to find, is a matter for further investigation, for which an expedition much

deeper into the area would be necessary. Downstream there is heavy bush for fifty miles alongside the river. Upstream there are clearings, though much bush still remains. The robin also appears to favour the area where the bush is continuous, as in every gully we crossed downstream we saw or heard robins, whereas none was in evidence in the bush-covered gullies between clearings upstream.

[Confirmation of Mr. Mead's report of the presence of the native thrush in the Wanganui River district will be awaited with keen interest. It is unfortunate that a more precise and more detailed description of the bird's plumage and appearance could not have been given, sufficient to prove that the bird was the species it is believed to be, but the difficulties of doing so in heavy bush country are fully recognised. The omission of certain salient points precludes a definite conclusion about the identity of the birds from the description supplied.—Ed.]

PAST AND FUTURE OF THE SOCIETY.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS AT ANNUAL MEETING.

The president, Mr. E. G. Turbott, in his address at the society's annual meeting, said:—"It is of particular interest that tonight the secretary presents the society's tenth annual report. The first meeting was held in May, 1940, and this is, therefore, an important anniversary in the life of the society. I should like to initiate this annual meeting by referring briefly to certain aspects of the society's work—past and future. In thinking of this I have found it interesting to read again the brief paragraph in our constitution which originally gave the society's aims and objects and was repeated in our first publication: Annual Report No. 1, for 1939-40.

"The paragraph differs from most formal statements of aims and objects in that it is brief, and, I think, inspiring: 'The object of the society is to encourage, organise and carry out field work on birds on a national scale.' It goes on to state that the collecting of specimens is not one of the society's objects, and this sentence ends with a further telling phrase that the society is 'concerned with the study of living birds in their natural state.' I think that now, on its tenth anniversary, the society can claim to have progressed very effectively towards this end. If nothing else had been achieved it could at least be claimed that in these ten years of its growth the society has seen the craze for bird-watching 'catch-on' in New Zealand.

"Bird-watchers in New Zealand are perhaps a less varied assemblage than is the same group in Britain, where, according to James Fisher's well-known book, they range from a Prime Minister to at least forty-six schoolmasters! But from the first our membership has represented a wide cross-section of the community, all with a common interest in birds, although with their many different points of view. Bird-watching has been referred to as both a hobby and a science, and it is one of its chief attractions that, while retaining an all-absorbing fascination, it has a noteworthy contribution to make to scientific bird study. I wish to refer to this because I should like to express our special indebtedness to those who have held one particular office of the society—that of editor of our publication.

"The society has planned a number of co-operative investigations, some of which have proved too ambitious, and some, like the gannet census, which are going with a swing. I think, however, that our main achievement in the past ten years has been the steady recording in our early reports and 'New Zealand Bird Notes' of observations which have filled many gaps in our knowledge of the habits and distribution of New Zealand birds. In this our editors have set a particularly high standard, and the successive bulletins have, I think, given a lead to many observers who might not have passed beyond the stage of accumulating interesting but unrelated facts. Our thanks are due, in particular, to