

screech several times. Five different moreporks had been calling; one had been in the tree outside the hut door, but the other call was a high pitched long screech. I had subconsciously registered it as what we termed at Home a screech owl and went out to see if I could spot it. I had located the call as coming from a tall more or less dead tree at the south end of the clearing, and had been on my stump perhaps half an hour when an owl flew out from that direction and circled round me twice, then flew back into the shadow of the tree and screeched two or three times. I was unable in the moonlight to distinguish any colouring—it looked either deep black when between me and the moon or silvery grey when circling the other side, but it struck me as being about half as big again as a morepork, two of which had previously silently flitted by. I took it for granted to be the screech owl of England both from size and voice—but I can find no record of this owl in "Oliver." I heard the bird (without question an owl of some species, as I know from its perfectly noiseless flight and the general shape and the formation of the wing, as it circled me twice within a few yards), several times through the night (owing to a grey 'possum which would share the hut with me I had very little sleep). Later on it was hunting in the valley below but the shrill screech could easily be heard at intervals.—A. A. Savell, Levin. [It is possible that this bird was an Australian barn owl (*Tyto alba*). One was obtained in Westland in 1947.—Ed.]

WESTPORT BIRD NOTES (period March, 1949, to June, 1950).—There is a great variety and abundance of bird life in this district. Unfortunately the average resident has little appreciation and respect for it. Except for small clumps of bush along the streams and rivers and in swampy areas the countryside is mostly cleared. However, there remains much bush on the surrounding hills and in the Buller Gorge five to six miles away. Approximate distances shown are from the Post Office in the centre of the town. Black Shag: Often seen in Buller River and near mouth of Orowaiti River; 1½m. White Heron: An annual visitor. Seen May, 1949, near bridge over Orowaiti River; 1m. Subsequently reported from Ngakawau. Again seen near bridge on 17/6/50. White-faced Heron: Several pairs are usually to be seen on the banks of the Buller and Orowaiti rivers; 4/12/49, one seen at Tauranga Bay, 8m; 17/6/50, three at Orowaiti River. Black Swan: 1949, one at Orowaiti R. Bittern: 17/6/50, two seen in small swampy area about half-mile from P.O. Reported to be not uncommon. Harrier: Not uncommon; 21/6/50, 1 seen flying high over centre of town. Pukeko: Not common. One alighted on tree at McKennas Creek, 2m.; small number at Firdown, 5m.; 1 on Nine-Mile Road, 3m. Pied Oystercatcher: May, 1949, often up to six to be seen at teatime near mouth of Orowaiti R.; 2m. Black Oystercatcher: 1949, one or two occasionally near mouth of Orowaiti R.; 1½m. Banded Dotterel: 2/1/50, one at Carters Beach, 3m. Red-billed Gull: 1950, numbers seen in ground of Westport South School. Wood Pigeon: 27/8/49 and 23/10/49, one at McKennas Creek, 2m.; 5/11/49, one at Giles Creek, 3m. Not common around Westport. Morepork: 13/6/50, young morepork caught; later released. Moreporks are heard from time to time about the town. Kingfisher: Very common and always to be seen near bridge over Orowaiti R., 1m. 18/6/50, counted 17 on wire between two telegraph poles near Orowaiti Bridge. Pipit: Very common on outskirts of town and in surrounding countryside. Fern Bird: 1/7/50, two on Caroline Terrace, 5m. This is pakihi land, wet and covered with stunted manuka, rushes, etc., a most bleak-looking area and entirely unsuited for cultivation. Grey Warbler: Fairly common; often seen or heard. Yellow-breasted Tit: 4/6/49, one at Reservoir, 3m.; 17/7/49, one at McKennas Creek; 28/8/49, several near Seddonville, 25m.; 5/11/49, one at Giles Creek; 22/12/49, one at Buller R.; 1/7/50, three at Omanu Creek, 6m. Robin: 7/3/50, two at Ohikanui R., 10m.; quite tame; frequently reported from this area. Fantail (Pied): Very common and always to be seen about town and outskirts. Black form also fairly common. Tui: August, 1949, very common at McKennas Creek when

kowhai in full bloom; occasionally seen and heard other times of year; 16/1/50, only one heard at McKennas Creek, 2m. Bellbird: Common in surrounding districts. Greenfinch: 17/7/49, several at McKennas Creek; 21/6/50, 1, and 25/6/50, several seen in town, also at Coal Creek, 5m. Chaffinch: Common. Goldfinch: 15/7/49, common near Orowaiti R.; 5/6/50, one in Buller Gorge. Yellowhammer: 15/7/49, fairly common near Orowaiti R. Song Thrush and Blackbird: Fairly common. Hedge Sparrow: Occasionally seen about the house. Skylark: 15/7/49, heard singing at Orowaiti R., where frequently to be seen and heard. Starling: Common at Orowaiti River; May, 1949, many large flocks seen coming upstream each evening before dusk. Amongst others the following birds have also been reported: Weka, blue duck, grey duck, rifleman, kaka, and possibly kiwi, also red-fronted parakeet. These have yet to be confirmed at first hand.—V. M. Readman, Westport.

**WOOD PIGEONS EATING SHOOTS AND LEAVES.**—At Te Araroa I was in the garden, about December 23, 1949, when a wood pigeon fluttered across and settled on the top of a slender Lawsoniana. In a few seconds it was joined by another, then another until there were five. They picked the little green shoots for a while, then one by one they came to an apple tree not more than six yards from where I sat on the grass. They made a real meal of apple leaves and didn't seem to bother about me at all, though they must have seen me. Their close proximity gave me an excellent opportunity of seeing their beautiful plumage. On another evening they came back and all five sat on the Lawsoniana bending down its slender top and swaying up and down, picking at the shoots.—M. M. Taylor, Gisborne.

**IRRUPTION OF BLACK SWANS.**—For the last two weeks (first two weeks in June) hundreds of black swans have frequented the Manukau Harbour, near the mouth of the Big Muddy Creek. The first day I saw six, second day 38, the third day 536 and since then the numbers have increased so much I find it impossible to count them through the telescope. During the years I have lived here I have never seen swans in this locality before.—Mrs. J. Howes, Laingholm, via New Lynn.

## CORRESPONDENCE.

### SHINING CUCKOO.

(To the Editor.)

Sir,—It was not my intention to reply to J. S. Watson and P. C. Bull's summing up of my observations (*Forest and Bird*, 55, 5, 1940) in your issue of April, 1950, but so many friends have written to me suggesting a reply I do so to please them.

From 1909 to 1924 my life was spent breaking in a block of native bush about 16 miles back from Opotiki, Bay of Plenty. Access to my section was by bridle track, six miles of which was through virgin bush, another two miles through newly felled and grassed bush land, with odd pieces of native bush, ideal breeding places for many birds, including the grey warbler and the shining cuckoo. My children and I knew our native birds intimately, including the blue wattled crow (and knew where to find its habitat) as well as seeing flocks of kakas and many a kaka's nest while I was felling bush, not to mention kererua, tuis and bellbirds in abundance. I had a piece of native bush reserved within fifty yards of my homestead with native trees and exotic hedges, together with one hundred fruit trees between this and my house, the whole making a splendid field for observation.

All those years I kept a yearly record of when the first shining cuckoo was seen (not heard)—the usual date was September (often heard earlier), occasionally early October, sufficient time for the cuckoo to lay her eggs and for the young to be hatched by late November. My wife and family all learned to recognise our native birds—the children used the term "pip pip" for the shining cuckoo, which, together with the long-tailed cuckoo, was a regular visitor. On at least one occasion a