

## FOOD OF THE CHICK OF NOTORNIS HOCHSTETTERI.

By L. Gurr, Nelson.

The following observations were made during a visit to the nesting area of *Notornis hochstetteri* from 1st to 11th December, 1949. Adjacent to the nest the parent birds scrape up with their claws the sphagnum and tussock bases in search of insects and other animal food for the chick. These "scrapes" (see Plate XXVI.) cover areas up to six or eight square yards, and are quite unlike the normal evidence of feeding of the adults. The presence of these scrapes is an indication that a young chick is being fed in the locality. Three other pairs of birds were under observation, two had nests with eggs and the breeding status of the third pair was doubtful; in none of these birds' territories were feeding scrapes found.

A freshly dropped faecal pellet of the chick (age one week) belonging to the territory where the scrapes were found was collected. This measured approximately 40 x 5 mm., was cylindrical and pointed at both ends and consisted of a loosely bound wet mass of chitinous animal matter with a small amount (about a quarter of its bulk) of vegetable matter. Its colour was brownish black. A subsequent examination of the faecal pellets revealed the following recognisable animal remains:—

### Insecta—

Diptera—*Calliphora* sp.—2 larvae, 3 pupae.

Tipulidae—1 pupa.

Tabanidae (?)—36 black eggs.

Lepidoptera—1 pupa, 1 larva.

### Arachnida—

Opiliones—2.

Araneida—1

### Annelida—

Oligochaeta—Several *Plagiochaeta* sp. fragments of skin.

The vegetable matter was mainly very finely divided snowgrass (*Danthonia* sp.)

In order to check the available fauna of the feeding area, collections were made in the sphagnum and tussock bases adjacent to the scrapes. The results of which, in order of abundance, were:—  
In Sphagnum.

### Insecta—

Diptera—Tipulidae larvae and pupae.

Tabanidae larvae.

### Annelida—

Oligochaeta—*Plagiochaeta* sp.

### In Tussock Bases.

### Insecta—

Coleoptera—Tenebrionid sp. adults.

Lepidoptera cocoons.

### Myriapoda—

Chilopoda—centipedes.

All the above with the exception of centipedes were represented in the faecal pellet.

Mr. C. A. Fleming, in February, 1950, collected a chick faecal pellet, which must have been from a chick approximately two months old at that time, and kindly submitted it to me for examination. It was cylindrical and tapered at either end and measured approximately 60 x 8 mm. It consisted entirely of vegetable matter, mostly leaf bases of snowgrass, and except in shape and size was the same as an adult faecal pellet. The animal diet of the young chick had by this time been forsaken for the entirely vegetable diet of the adult.