

BIRD NOTES FROM STEWART ISLAND.

By E. W. Dawson, Christchurch.

During late January and early February of 1951, I spent about three weeks traversing the northern part of Stewart Island, in company with Mr. R. G. Frean, of Christchurch, to whom my thanks are due for allowing me to turn a deer-stalking holiday into an ornithological trip of some interest. The following account is compiled from our joint observations during that time:—

Kiwi (*Apteryx australis*).—At night, calls were heard frequently in the bush in certain areas; North Arm, Paterson Inlet, 19/1/51; along the Freshwater River, 20/1/51; on the slopes of Mt. Rakiahua, south-east of Island Hill, and all along the slopes of Rakiahua to the hut at the Rakiahua River. Kiwi beak prod marks were seen in the swampy areas in the manuka scrub beside this hut. During our stay here (eight days), kiwis were very noisy in the bush at night.

Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*).—One was seen during the crossing between Bluff and Stewart Island.

Mutton Bird (*Puffinus griseus*).—Numbers followed the ship on the crossings. At Mason Bay, calls were heard late at night on several occasions.

Mollymawks (*Thalassarche* spp.).—Three mollymawks were seen from the ship during the crossing. One of these was a shy mollymawk (*T. cauta*), but it was not possible to tell whether it was (*T. cauta steadi*), the large form, or the other shy mollymawk with the grey neck, the robust form of *T. cauta salvini*. Twenty unidentified mollymawks were seen off Ringaringa Beach and about 200 others were seen in Halfmoon Bay (4/2/51). Of these, only about half-a-dozen were seen closely, and appeared to be shy mollymawks. An immature shy mollymawk was seen on the return trip to Bluff.

Pied Shag (*Phalacrocorax varius*).—One seen flying over the North Arm, 19/1/51; 6, Mason Bay, 22/1/51; 2, mudflats, South-west Arm (Caerhowel) of Paterson Inlet; 4, at mouth of Rakiahua River, 2/2/51; 4, on rocks between South-west Arm and Abraham's Bay, Paterson Inlet, 3/2/51.

White-throated Shag (*P. melanoleucos*).—A completely black bird was seen up the Rakiahua River near the hut, 27-30/1/51. At the mouth of this river were 13 birds in various phases of plumage, 2/2/51.

Stewart Island Shag (*Leucocarbo c. chalconotus*).—A few "Stewart Island" forms were seen during the crossing from Bluff. Both the "Stewart Island" and "bronze" forms were seen on rocks in Halfmoon Bay. Between the South-west Arm and Abraham's Bay, seven "bronze" were seen. Lonneker's Rock was virtually covered with the "bronze" on 5/2/51.

Blue Shag (*Stictocarbo punctatus steadi*).—A number seen on rocks in Halfmoon Bay on our arrival, 19/1/51. Between the South-west Arm and Golden Bay, four, 2/2/51.

Grey Duck (*Anas poicilorhyncha*).—Ten at the mouth of the Rakiahua River on mudflats (R.G.F., 31/1/51) and later, a flight of 45 near the same place (E.W.D., 2/2/51).

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*).—Ten near Duck Creek, Mason Bay, 23/1/51.

Harrier (*Circus approximans*).—Seen on several occasions.

Weka (*Gallirallus australis*).—Weka calls were heard frequently at night in the Rakiahua Valley. Three birds were often seen within a few yards of the hut door and fed on our scraps. One of them was slightly darker than the others (which appeared to be typical *G. australis*) but not so dark as that described by Ogilvie-Grant as *Ocydromus scotti*. There seemed to be only two or three pairs in the vicinity, in spite of the loud and numerous calls at night.

Black Oystercatcher (*Haematopus unicolor*).—At Mason Bay, this bird was common and apparently breeding. Six mature birds with a very large downy chick were seen (22/1/51) and next day, along one mile of beach, 17 were counted. Three very small chicks were seen with a group of mature birds, 24/1/51. Near Halfmoon Bay, one was seen on Ringaringa Beach and another at Golden Bay. A group of 10 was seen at the mouth of the Rakiahua River, 3/2/51.

Banded Dotterel (*Charadrius bicinctus*).—Seven birds were seen in the sandhills at Duck Creek, Mason Bay. Four of these were typical males. Later, 16 birds were counted in the same area.

N.Z. Dotterel (*Pluviorhynchus obscurus*).—Ten were seen at Mason Bay on one occasion, one of these accompanying a very small chick. On another occasion about eight pairs were seen with a number of juveniles.

Black-fronted Tern (*Chlidonias albigularis*).—One was seen off Cone Island, Paterson Inlet, 3/2/51.

White-fronted Tern (*Sterna striata*).—One seen at Mason Bay on 24/1/51. About 12 in Halfmoon Bay and three on Ringaringa Beach, 4/2/51.

Black-backed Gull (*Larus dominicanus*).—Six or eight gulls followed the ship across from Bluff and also on the return trip. Common on Mason Bay Beach, between 40 and 50 within a mile or two. Mature birds were seen feeding on soles washed up in the surf. Gulls were numerous on the mudflats in the South-west Arm and odd birds were seen up the Rakiahua River. This gull was common in Paterson Inlet and over 50 birds were counted in the vicinity of H.M.S. Lachlan which was at anchor near the Island of Ulva, 3/2/51. A rough count showed about 50 birds on the rocks near the main wharf in Halfmoon Bay with c. 100 on the wharf itself.

Red-billed Gull (*L. novaehollandiae*).—Found commonly at Halfmoon Bay. At Mason Bay only three gulls were seen, 22-23/1/51. In the South-west Arm very few, varying daily from one to three. About 50 were noted on a small rock between Iona and Golden Bay, in Paterson Inlet. Three were seen on Ringaringa Beach.

Pigeon (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*).—We saw relatively few; one at Leask's Bay; one at Mason Bay; one in bush north of Walker's Hill; one in the Rakiahua Valley, and several in the bush near the mouth of the Rakiahua River. This bird was quite common in the bush between Halfmoon Bay and Ringaringa and a flight of six was seen going across Paterson Inlet to Ulva.

Kaka (*Nestor meridionalis*).—Five were seen between Halfmoon Bay and the North Arm and others were heard near the Freshwater River. Kakas were also heard on the lower slopes of Mt. Rakiahua. The kaka seems to be spreading rapidly to the settled areas of the island.

Parakeets (*Cyanoramphus* spp.).—Calls were heard frequently in the bush between Halfmoon Bay and the North Arm; five were seen together. Calls were numerous at the Freshwater River hut. Other calls were heard in bush bordering Mason Bay and in the forested slopes of Mt. Rakiahua. Two red-fronted parakeets (*C. novaeseelandiae*) were seen in the bush bordering the Rakiahua River. Parakeets were often seen high above the trees of the bush at the mouth of the river but identification was impossible. Mr. A. W. Traill informed me that, generally speaking, the red-fronted parakeet was commoner on the main island than the yellow-fronted (*C. auriceps*). The latter is, according to him, commoner on the off-shore islands.

Shining Cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*).—One seen in macrocarpa trees at Ringaringa Point, 5/2/51.

Long-tailed Cuckoo (*Eudynamis taitensis*).—One chased by a tui on the manuka-covered Freshwater River plains. Occasional calls were heard in the forested slopes of Mt. Rakiahua but every day calls were frequent in a group of macrocarpa trees and from the surrounding

expanse of manuka at the Rakiahua Hut. Calls were also heard in Halfmoon Bay.

Morepork (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*).—Calls were heard at dusk between Halfmoon Bay and the North Arm and along the Freshwater River; from the bush at the north end of Mason Bay; and from the bush above the Rakiahua Valley.

Kingfisher (*Halcyon sanctus*).—One on the Rakiahua River near the hut; another on Cone Island, Paterson Inlet.

Rifleman (*Acanthisitta chloris*).—Two were seen at Ringaringa Point by R.G.F. and Mr. A. W. Traill.

Bush Wren (*Xenicus longipes*).—A bird which was almost certainly this species was seen between Deep Bay and Ringaringa by R. G. F. and myself, with Mr. A. W. Traill, who told us that he had not seen any wrens on the main island for many years but now, within recent years, he had seen an increasing number, similar to those on Kotiwhenu.

Pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*).—Two near the Gorge Hut, Freshwater River plains. In manuka scrub and grass behind Mason Bay, pipits were seen commonly.

Fern Bird (*Bowdleria punctata*).—Several were seen and others heard at the Gorge Hut, 21/1/51. Mr. Traill told us that it was quite common in most of the areas of manuka scrub, particularly in the Freshwater River plain and the Rakiahua Valley.

Grey Warbler (*Pseudogerygone igata*).—Commonly seen and heard in the bush between Halfmoon Bay and the North Arm of Paterson Inlet.

Yellow-breasted Tit (*Petroica m. macrocephala*).—Four males and a female seen between Halfmoon Bay and the hut at the Freshwater River, where three females and another male were seen. The intensity of breast colour in the males was much lighter than in any I have seen in South Island birds in the field, at this or any other time of the year. These males and all others seen during this trip appeared white-breasted in the field and were very similar to the pied tit (*P. m. toitoi*).. Some of this paleness may be due, as C. A. Fleming states (T.R.S.N.Z., 78:30) to age and to seasonal fading. Residents of Stewart Island say that the normal forms with a yellow breast are seen commonly there but at what seasons of the year we were unable to find out. Three pairs of tits, with pale-breasted males, were seen in bush on the lower slopes of Mt. Rakiahua, 24/1/51. About six similar males were seen at various places in the bush along the Rakiahua River. Even in the bush above Ringaringa Beach, we saw a pair, the male of which was white-breasted, 4/2/51.

Stewart Island Robin (*Petroica (Miro) australis rakiura*).—Confirmation of C. A. Fleming's "weak" subspecies, recently proposed by him (T.R.S.N.Z., 78:141-143) was given in the field by our independent observations on this form. To us, the bird seemed smaller than the typical South Island form, the back of the male seemed darker and the breast was more of a "dirty white." Two males and a female were seen at the Freshwater River hut, 21/1/51, while a pair or two were always in and about the hut at the Rakiahua River, where we were for eight days. A bird would sometimes fly down the chimney while we were cooking on the fire, its "dirty white" breast and dark back being even more noticeable then! A few pairs could usually be found in the bush along the Rakiahua River.

Brown Creeper (*Finschia novaeseelandiae*).—The peculiar trilling call was constantly heard around the Rakiahua Hut as small flocks (6 to 8 birds) flew through the manuka scrub in the sunshine.

White-eye (*Zosterops lateralis*).—Four seen in the bush between Halfmoon Bay and Ringaringa, feeding on *Coprosma* berries. Residents told us that the birds had developed a great liking for picking at venison hung from trees in the settled areas.

Tui (*Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*).—Tuis were seen very commonly during our trip in all parts of the heavy bush in which we were.

They also were common in the manuka scrub of the Freshwater River plain and in the *Olearia* groves in the sandhills at Mason Bay. They were very noticeable around the hut at the Rakiwha River, indulging in vigorous song, especially on one particular evening before a day of intermittent rain and dull conditions when the quiet of the night was made cacophonous with the continual calling of tuis, robins, kiwis, wekas, moreporks, etc. Tuis were also commonly seen during a few hours spent on Cone Island in Paterson Inlet. They were a common sight in the bush above Halfmoon Bay and must surely be the most ubiquitous birds on Stewart Island.

Bell Bird (*Anthornis melanura*).—As ubiquitous as the tui but seemed slightly less abundant.

Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*).—Two seen in the manuka covered plain near Island Hill, Mason Bay, 22/1/51.

Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*).—Two seen in the bush above Halfmoon Bay, 5/2/51.

Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*).—Several in the groves of *Olearia* near Martin's Creek, Mason Bay; others near Ringaringa Beach in macrocarpa trees.

Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*).—Two seen near Martin's Creek, Mason Bay, 23/1/51.

Thrush (*Turdus ericetorum*).—Several above Ringaringa Beach.

Blackbird (*T. merula*).—Heard in the bush between Halfmoon Bay and Ringaringa.

Hedge Sparrow (*Prunella modularis*).—One was seen at Duck Creek, Mason Bay.

Stewart Island presents an interesting area for the ornithologist, and it is to be hoped that a more comprehensive account of the bird life, based on Dr. W. R. B. Oliver's work of 1926, will be made when details of the effects of such predators as deer and cats on the plant and bird life become available.

DUNEDIN NATURALISTS' FIELD CLUB NOTES.

By (Mrs.) I. Tily, recorder.

References to the bird life of Stewart Island when a party of members from the Dunedin Naturalists' Field Club spent a week at Oban, Stewart Island, from January 18-25, 1950, appear below:—

Kiwi.—One paid a brief, unwilling, visit to the hotel garden in a box on its way from Mason Bay to the Ulva Island Scenic Reserve and Bird Sanctuary, where it was to be released.

Little Blue Penguin (*Endiptyula minor*).—We had a calm passage across to the Island and numbers of these birds were seen in Foveaux Strait. The return trip was rough, and only two or three were noted. On launch trips we never failed to see this penguin swimming and diving about the coast and in Paterson Inlet. On a long launch trip from Halfmoon Bay to The Neck and up Paterson Inlet, the numbers seen would be anything from 50 to 80.

Cape Pigeon (*Daption capensis*).—Definitely recorded only once.

Giant Petrel.—Seen in flight while at the Island and during a stormy homeward passage several were recorded.

Mutton Birds.—Present in Foveaux Strait in numbers on January 18th; on the return journey not noted until we entered more sheltered waters in the lee of Bluff Hill. They were also seen on launch trips.

Albatrosses were seen in numbers on launch trips, but not always near enough for identification. The following were identified on coastal launch trips: Buller's mollymawk (*Thalassarche bulleri*) and white-capped mollymawk (*T. cauta*).

Shags were numerous. We identified the following: Black shag (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), pied shag and white-throated shags, Stewart Island and bronze shags, blue shag.