

BIRDS IN MANAWATU DISTRICT.

By Robert A. Wilson, Bulls.

The Manawatu County near the sea coast seems a favourite area for visiting birds or birds blown over from Australia. Several spine-tailed swifts were picked up in the district a few years ago and white herons are occasionally reported.

In October, 1935, a strange bird was reported near Foxton, and on investigation I found it was a glossy ibis. It lived on the lakes north of Foxton for several years. The last reported date of its being seen was November, 1942.

In 1944, I observed across the river at Foxton Heads four white birds which I presumed were white herons, but on receipt of a report by Mr. Stidolph, I investigated them more closely, and found they were royal spoonbills. Since then the spoonbills have made the mudflats at Manawatu Mouth their main feeding ground though they have been reported from the Patea River to the north and Waikanae to the south, and on one occasion from Lake Ellesmere. While at Foxton they have never shown any signs of breeding, though I have kept them under observation. In July, 1946, after being reported from Ellesmere, only three returned. In 1947 there were three, but in 1949 and 1950 they were reduced to two, and early in 1951 to one bird.

Last year, however, Dr. Falla reported having seen a pair of royal spoonbills in breeding plumage at the white heronry at Okarito. A few months ago the one royal spoonbill at Foxton was reinforced by three more. When circling about flying the three kept together as if a family party while the fourth seemed an outsider. This party may be a pair which has nested at Okarito and reared one young and returned to Foxton. At present however they have separated into two pairs as if the single bird had mated with one of the three.

The latest visitors to report on are white-fronted herons. I was told of strange birds being reported near the Moutoua Swamp and went to investigate. Visiting a small clump of tall white pine trees I saw a pair of these herons perched in a tall tree. They were very wild and flew when I was a good distance away but returned to the same tree, so it is possible they may nest there. Though I saw only two, four birds are reported to be in the locality. Possibly these are from the heronry reported to be near the mouth of the Waitaki, in the South Island, as it does not seem likely they would be blown over in that number from Australia.

NOTES ON THE HEATHCOTE-AVON ESTUARY.—My observations are similar to those of David E. Crockett (Notornis, Vol. 4, No. 6) headed "Christchurch Estuary." The main changes in 1951 were:—(1) That godwits were not present (as far as I could observe) in the winter months (April-September). (2) There were several white-throated shags. In mid-February a young white-throated shag (black plumage) appeared in Monck's Bay, and on April 23, two adult and three juvenile white-throated shags were seen in McCormack's Bay where they remained for most of the winter. A pied shag also appeared in the same locality in May, in addition to the usual black and spotted shags. A pied shag was seen in the estuary again on October 5th. On July 1 about 30 pied stilts and 18 black swans appeared in the western end of the estuary. The black swans increased in numbers and remained much longer than usual. On October 1 there were about 200 black swans in addition to about 500 godwits and 1,000 pied oystercatchers.—G. Guy, Christchurch.