

MYNA (*Acridotheres tristis*).—Howick, 17/3/51, eight in garden; now plentiful.—(N.M.) Lake Rotorua, 8/11/50, single bird seen at the six-mile peg, Rotorua-Tauranga main highway.—(M.J.S.B.) 2/1/51, on a drive from Te Karaka to Hexton counted 150 on the road.—(C.K.W.) Feilding, 1951, at least five pairs in business area.—(E.D.)

WHITE-BACKED MAGPIE (*Gymnorhina hypoleuca*).—Karakā, 23/7/51, one, casual.—(D.A.U.) Ruatoria district, they arrived in this district in about 1933; now numerous and appear well settled.—(C.K.W.) Geraldine district, heard from dawn till dusk, so common that only flocks over 20 were recorded. On Jan. 17, near Te Moana, a flock of 30 to 40; Jan. 28, near Kakahu, flock of 28.—(D.N.F.C.) Stirling, none in district.—(R.V.McL.) For some years usual to see about half-dozen at Morrison's, near Dunback; seen 10-15/1/51.—(F.R.B.)

BLACK-BACKED MAGPIE (*G. tibicen*).—Between Dannevirke and Woodville, 13/11/50, 1; Martinborough, 5/9/51, one.—(J.M.C.)

MAGPIE (*Gymnorhina* ? sp.).—Parakai, near Helensville, 9/7/51, one with black band across upper back.—(R.E.S.)

HERONS IN CANTERBURY.

By H. Barker, Kaiapoi.

A waste of mud, water and rushes and a flooded gateway, and on either of the gate's two supporting posts, a heron—pale greyish blue, almost white—very upright, tall and slender, with head well back and long necks curved forward.

They regarded my approach with more curiosity than alarm, and from a distance of about thirty yards I was able to watch them as they stood motionless like two exquisite figures in porcelain. This was my first view of these unusual visitors to my farm at Kaiapoi, and incidentally the only time they allowed me to approach them closely. We have been long familiar with both the blue and white herons, but these birds were obviously different, and it was some time before I was able to identify them as the white-fronted heron (*matuku moana*) a species of which I had never heard before in this district.

This was February 25, 1951, and for several days these birds were a familiar sight as they waded, fishing in the shallow waters of the swamp; and then they were joined by two more. After that, progress was rapid, and by March 15 there were eleven. The whole family was interested by this time, and competition was keen in establishing a new count, which was not hard to do as they kept on coming. By the end of March there were thirty-six—but that seemed to be the limit.

Owing to the very wet summer, the fields were all more or less flooded, and everywhere there were countless thousands of frogs (they even invaded the house at night if the doors were left open) and every pool and every puddle was soon swarming with tadpoles, so even when our thirty-six herons were joined by three white ones, the food supply was almost unlimited. The herons seemed to make our swamp their headquarters, and in the mornings could be seen flying off in groups to prove the surrounding country. Their habits seemed quite regular. In the morning, just before sunrise, they would come up from the swamp and settle along the tops of a row of tall pines close to the house. There, in the first rays of the sun, they would make a leisurely toilet, preening their feathers and sunning themselves for about half an hour, then, in small groups, would drift off to an adjacent pond to wade and play for an hour or so before moving further afield. In the evening the same order was observed, and we used to watch about half an hour before sunset for them coming in to perch on the tree-tops in the last sunlight,

and carefully order their toilet before dropping down to their roosting places in the bare branches of a row of scraggy willows. This procedure seemed never to vary, except that on wet days they did not linger so long on the pine trees.

The first birds to come, being very light in colour, were apparently young ones, but later they appeared in all stages of plumage, from almost white to slaty-blue, but all with the characteristic white strips on the face. Unlike the blue heron, which always seems a doleful, solitary bird, they seemed a happy and playful crowd, and would spend hours chasing one another and twisting and tumbling in the air. This was particularly noticeable on wet or misty days.

They became more timid as their numbers increased, and although I tried many times to obtain a photograph of them, it was without success, as there always seemed to be a sentinel posted in some prominent place to give warning of my approach.

About the middle of June we had a series of severe frosts which covered the pools with thick ice, and it was amusing to see them all sitting along the sunny side of the trees, while at intervals, two of their number would fly down and hover, like helicopters, over the water, and then fly back to report "Water still unfishable." However, this was evidently too much for them and they moved off after a sojourn with us of almost four months.

The white ones were evidently made of sterner stuff, as they stayed on for another three weeks, their number by this time having increased to five; and five white herons sitting on the sunny side of a green pine tree is an unforgettable sight.

KING SHAG IN MARLBOROUGH SOUNDS.—During a dredging expedition on m.l. Alert from 29/8/51 to 2/9/51, the following observations were made by R. K. Dell, C. A. Fleming and J. Moreland:—White Rocks, 31/8/51: About 70 birds, including several flying immature, very timid, none on nests; a few new nests visible were further west on ledge than in 1950. Stack, off Forsythe Island, 1/9/51: On penultimate of chain of stacks off west side, Forsythe Island, on a south-facing ledge, about 150 adults, 29 nests with young in various stages of down. No brown flying young seen. North Trio, 1/9/51: 95 to 110 birds including 18 feathered young which may not have been flying as they remained when the rest flew at approach of the vessel. Fifteen nests visible on slope. The Sentinel was not visited.

OCCURRENCE OF THE BROLGA (*Megalornis rubicundus*) in New Zealand.—From March to May, 1947, a large bird was seen and heard in the vicinity of Clevedon by more than 80 people. From a study of all reports, and comparison with museum specimens of a feather found, it is concluded that the bird was a brolga (*Megalornis rubicundus*). The feather appeared to be abraded at the edges in a manner suggesting it had come from a captive bird, but this damage had apparently occurred in the removal of the feather from the mud, into which it had been trampled by a cow. The brolga, a native of Australia, is frequently kept in captivity there, but careful inquiries have not revealed the presence of any of these birds at any time in New Zealand. Whether the occurrence of the bird, which has not hitherto been recorded in the country, can be accepted as a valid addition to the New Zealand list, will be a matter for the Checklist Committee to decide. Full details of the occurrence were published by us in "The Weekly News," July 18, 1951, page 38, "Mystery Bird Puzzles Observers—Australian Brolga Visits Auckland District."—(H. R. McKenzie, Clevedon, and J. M. Cunningham, Masterton.)