

NOTORNIS REPORTED SEEN IN 1910.

The following letter, written by Mr. W. A. Cumming, of 23 Ngarimu Street, Palmerston North, to Mr. Edgar Dear, of Kopane, under date August 23, 1952, is published with the writer's permission:—

"Referring to our conversation of a few weeks ago regarding the rediscovery of the previously believed to be extinct notornis by Dr. Orbell in 1948, this gentleman, and no doubt other ornithologists might be interested to learn that in company with several others, I personally saw a notornis in late January, 1910.

"At this time I was serving as a leading-seaman aboard H.M.S. Challenger, when the ship left on a cruise to Stewart Island and the West Coast Sounds, calling at Preservation Inlet, Breaksea, Doubtful, Dusky, Milford and George Sounds.

"So far as I can recall, the ship anchored only at Preservation Inlet, Milford and George sounds, passing through Breaksea, Dusky and Doubtful sounds during daylight, it being purely a sight-seeing cruise for the captain, officers and ship's company, 50 per cent. of whom were Imperial ratings, the remainder being composed of Australians and New Zealanders.

"After leaving Milford, where the ship stayed several days, we made for George Sound, where we dropped anchor at a place called Gear Arm, a beautiful stretch of water surrounded by mountains from 1500 to 2000 feet or more in height covered with dense bush right down to the water's edge. The ship stayed at this spot for two days, and our racing cutter's crew (12 men and a coxswain) of which I was a member, who were in training for a race against a cutter's crew from H.M.S. Pioneer on our return to Port Chalmers, grasped the opportunity of going away for a three-mile pull, night and morning.

"On the second day after our arrival we had completed a strong workout in the cutter and were resting on our oars having a breather and would be about 50 feet or thereabouts from the shore, when without any warning a large bird emerged from the bush and walked out to a small sandspit in full view of the cutter's crew. Almost immediately I called the attention of my opposite number by saying, "Hi, Nobby, get an eyeful of the outsize in pukekos. Have you ever seen one as big as that before?" To which he replied, "What a lovely shot. Wish we had a rifle in the boat." We sat quietly watching the bird for several minutes. It appeared to be watching the boat and I observed that while it appeared to have all the characteristics of a pukeko there was a marked difference in size particularly, and in colour. The beak was more powerful, and the legs stronger. I would say that it was at least twice the size of any pukeko I had seen, like a Black Orpington rooster, for instance, but more streamlined. The head, neck and breast appeared to be indigo blue, being brighter in parts; the back and towards the tail appeared to be of greenish colour, while the upper parts of the legs were more black than blue. I also observed some white feathers under the tail. The beak appeared to be bright red, changing to a pinky hue, but brighter at the tip as near as I can recall, and the legs of a reddish colour. Had the sun been shining at the time, I should imagine that it would have made this bird look very much prettier. Altogether, I should think that the bird was in full view of the cutter's crew for three or four minutes, until one of the crew dropped his oar in the water, when the bird immediately took fright and scuttled back into the bush. We waited a few minutes, but there was no further sign of the bird, and we returned to the ship. Apart from mentioning the matter to several other New Zealanders on the ship at the time, I never gave another thought to the incident until some few years later, when a schoolteacher friend of mine going overseas with the 1st N.Z.E.F. gave me a book on N.Z. flora and fauna, and on opening same the first thing I observed, it being the only coloured plate in the book, was a picture of a notornis, the replica of the bird I had seen at Gear Arm several years previously, and which I had read about as being extinct.

"Subsequently, on reading an article in the 'Auckland Weekly News' about this bird wherein it was stated that only four live specimens had ever been seen, the last in 1898, which had been caught by a dog near Lake Te Anau, and that three of these were now in museums: one in London, one

in either Berlin or Dresden, and one in the Dunedin Museum, I decided to write to the late Mr. Edgar Stead and tell him of my experience at Gear Arm in 1910. Actually, I did write a similar account of my experience as I've written here, but got the idea into my head that Mr. Stead may have thought I was romancing in view of the fact that such a long time had elapsed, and I had not reported it. The facts of the matter are that at the time I knew nothing about a notornis or that ever one existed. What I really thought I saw at Gear Arm was an outside in pukekos, and it was not until I saw the coloured plate in the book my friend gave me that I realised it was something totally different. Perhaps if we as children had been taught a little more about natural history in our schools we wouldn't have grown up so ignorant as to what this country contained in the way of bird life, etc."

INQUIRY INTO THE STATUS OF FAIRY TERN IN N.Z. INTERIM REPORT.

By Noelle Macdonald, Howick.

From over 120 questionnaires distributed to members regarding the inquiry into the status of the fairy tern (*Sterna nereis*) only 27 have been returned. These have come from all parts of the country, ranging from Stewart Island to Whangaroa, through many of the central areas of the two islands.

As far as can be judged at this stage, the fairy tern anywhere is rare, and numbers seem to have diminished in the South Island especially, where at the turn of the century this bird was comparatively plentiful. There are early records of the bird having been observed in such areas as the Rakaia River mouth and Lake Ellesmere, but recent records are mostly confined to the North Island, chiefly in the Pakiri-Mangawhai and Waipu-Ruakaka areas, though one or two birds have been observed at different times on the Kaipara, Manukau and Firth of Thames. Within the last twenty years the fairy tern has been observed at Tauranga, Manawatu, Blenheim and the Rangitikei River, and some eggs collected at Hawke's Bay are now in the Canterbury Museum; but no birds have been reported from these areas in recent years.

The only known present-day breeding ground appears to be on the sandhills just south of Mangawhai, where nests were recorded in the last twelve years. In 1951 a nest was reported to Mr. L. Wintle, who also found a fledgling that had just left the nest. In 1939, 1940 and 1941 nests were found and photographed by Dr. C. A. Fleming, Major G. A. Buddle and Mr. S. D. Potter. No other nest records have as yet come to hand, but this does not mean that the birds have not nested elsewhere. Further information in this respect is required.

Regarding population numbers, according to reports received so far, not more than six birds have been seen at any one time or place, except a very doubtful record of twenty at Stewart Island. Odd birds have been observed at various places in the North Island, but the fact that they have been recorded only once tends to show that they were probably birds of passage and not regular inhabitants.

One fact evident, even at this early stage of the inquiry, is the marked decrease of the fairy tern in New Zealand, and the extreme importance of preserving the remaining few. It is gratifying to learn that the Department of Internal Affairs has now declared the Mangawhai area—beach and sandhills—a sanctuary. Much of the credit for this goes to Mr. Wintle, who pressed the urgency of the matter with the Department.

Much more information is still required and if members have any knowledge whatsoever of the fairy tern in New Zealand would they please send it to the organiser of the inquiry, Miss N. Macdonald, Keppoch Lodge, Sale Street, Howick, Auckland. There may yet be other areas where this bird still breeds, and the importance of discovering these and taking the necessary preservation measures cannot be too strongly emphasised. Particularly important for further investigation by members are any areas of sandhills with a river or lake nearby. To those who have already helped with this inquiry sincere thanks are extended.

NOTICES TO MEMBERS.

SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING.—A Special General Meeting of the Society was held in the Dominion Museum, Wellington, on January 17, 1953. The North Island Vice-President, Mr. H. R. McKenzie, presided over a small attendance of members. A resolution providing for the doubling of subscriptions was amended and subscriptions now are: 5s. for juniors (up to the age of 18 years); 7s. 6d. for ordinary members; 10s. for endowment members; and £6 6s. for life members (over the age of 30 years). After considerable discussion, the new constitution drafted by the committee appointed for the purpose in 1951, was amended and adopted. The society was subsequently registered as an incorporated society on January 21, 1953.

GRANT FOR RINGING SCHEME.—In making the society a grant of £25 towards the cost of purchasing additional rings, the Department of Internal Affairs wishes the society all success in the continuation of its ringing work and looks forward to further years of close co-operation with the society in its activities. An extract from a letter from the Assistant-Secretary for Internal Affairs, states, "Although the Ornithological Society does not concern itself with protection of birds, but with their study and observation, I am pleased to say that it has indirectly done a great deal for protection of native birds because of the knowledge about them it has put on record. This Department has already had positive evidence of the interest in bird protection that the society's work has aroused." (Signed) G. L. O'Halloran. The society is grateful to the Department and the Controller of the Wildlife Division, Mr. G. F. Yerex, for the interest displayed in its activities and for the practical form of encouragement given.

NEW TREASURER.—Mr. J. M. Cunningham relinquished the position of treasurer, and Miss M. Macdonald, "Keppoch Lodge," Sale Street, Howick, Auckland, was appointed by the council to fill the vacancy as from April 1, 1953. All subscriptions should, therefore, now be sent to Miss Macdonald.

MEMBERS' ADDRESSES.—Members are again urged to check their addresses on the envelope and advise the secretary of any errors immediately.

NEST RECORDS AND BEACH PATROL.—Nest Records cards should be sent to Mr. J. King, Box 448, Masterton, and Beach Patrol cards to Mr. R. K. Dell, Dominion Museum, Wellington.

NOTORNIS REPORTED SEEN IN 1910.—In my letter published in the last issue of *Notornis* (p. 83) the location of Gear Arm was inadvertently given as being in George Sound, whereas it should have been Bradshaw Sound.—W. A. Cumming, Palmerston North.

CLASSIFIED NOTES.—The names of the following contributors should be added to those published in the last issue (p. 85):—

R. V. McIntock, Mrs. Stirling	L. E. Walker, Mrs., Dunedin.
I. Tily, Mrs., Dunedin.	A. S. Wilkinson, Levin.

NEW MEMBERS.

* Life member.

Beatson, J.L., 5 Passmore Cres. Dndin. Pearson, M., L.D.S. Farm, Frankton
Bourke, Miss K. 372 Stout St., Gisbne. Penniket, J.G., Poplar Av., Raumati S.
Coudrey, Mrs E.M., Maraetai, Auckld. Pittock, MrsD., 132 SydneySt.W., Wgtn
Crew, N.J., Whaterangi, Featherston. Perry, J.W., Sanson R.D., Palmston N.
Dalrymple, Miss N., 109 Gala St. Invgl. Favalloro N.J., Box 242, Mildura, Vic.
Harris, A.R., 52 Peter St. Dndn, SW1 *Tunnicliffe, C.F., Shorelands, Mall-
Munster, MrsE., 14 Jefferson St. Wgtn. traeth Bay, Bodorgan, Anglesey, Eng.