

## BIRD OBSERVATIONS AT ARAMOANA.

By L. E. Walker, Dunedin.

On March 22, 1952, the Dunedin Naturalists' Field Club held the first outing for the year at Aramoana, situated at the entrance to Otago Harbour. Sandhills extend for a mile across the western side of the entrance while harbour protection works (known as "The Mole") project into the sea for over three-quarters of a mile. On the inner side of the spit are mudflats which cover a considerable area at low tide. The Bird Section of the club concentrated its observations on the Mole in the morning and on the mudflats in the afternoon, when the tide was suitable for the waders, the result giving a total of 27 species for the outing.

The following were the observations made:—

Royal Albatross.—Six were noted on the sanctuary across the entrance. Through binoculars, one bird was seen landing and feeding the young chick. It is to be deplored that this colony has again suffered at the hands of vandals, despite the almost constant attendance of the ranger.

White-capped or Shy Mollymawk.—Three seen at sea off the end of the Mole.

White-throated Shag.—Fourteen on beacons in the harbour, 12 being the white-throated and two the little pied.

Stewart Island Shag.—Three noted, two flying near the Mole and one on a beacon inside the harbour entrance. Three birds of the bronze phase were seen in the water while a fourth was sitting on the Mole. On the cliff on the opposite side of the harbour entrance, 15 birds were noted where, on a previous occasion, Stewart Island shags had been seen flying to and from the nesting ground.

Spotted Shag.—One seen in Dowling Bay and four on the hulk off the Mole, each watching the party through a porthole.

Grey Duck.—Twelve in flight flying south.

Harrier.—Two noted.

South Island Pied Oystercatcher.—On the mudflats, 250 plus were seen.

Banded Dotterel.—Feeding all over the mudflats; too numerous to count.

Bar-tailed Godwit.—Fifty on mudflats.

Pied Stilt.—Forty-five feeding on the mudflats.

Caspian Tern.—Twelve.

White-fronted Tern.—On the Mole, 250 plus were counted. All appeared to be adults in winter moult and all had a pink flush on the breast (in several cases it was almost a rose shade). Two of the members had been on the Mole last November and had seen the nesting terns with a pink flush on the breast, but, on this occasion, the colour was much brighter.

Black-backed Gull.—Large flocks feeding on mudflats.

Red-billed Gull.—Flocks noted on the beach and a few birds mingled with the white-fronted terns.

Black-billed Gull.—Several seen.

Morepork.—One on roof of house in Waipuna Bay.

Grey Warbler.—Songs heard.

White-eye.—Flock of 20-30 noted.

Bellbird.—One seen.

Goldfinch.—Two noted.

Sparrow.—Flock of 50 seen.

Thrush.—One seen.

Blackbird.—One seen.

Hedgessparrow.—Calls heard.

Skylark.—Six seen.

Starling.—Flocks seen; 20-30 in one flock in flight.

A further visit to the area was made on April 14 by I. Tily and L. E. Walker and the following records were made:—

White-fronted Tern.—On the rocks at the extreme end of the Mole, 700 plus were seen. The pink flush was still apparent on the breasts of the birds but not quite so marked as on the previous visit in March. Birds were still in the process of moulting and there was a difference in the degree of greyness on some of the birds. Although a very careful check was made, no juveniles with the mottling on the wings could be seen.

Stewart Island Shag.—Seven birds of the bronze phase were seen in the water and two flying. Four birds with the alar bar and white dorsal patch were noted and one of these dived into the sea close to the observers. It came up with a red cod about 18 inches long in its bill and promptly swallowed it.

Buller's Mollymawk.—Five seen on the water off the stern of a small fishing boat moored close to the Mole.

Royal Albatross.—Six counted on the sanctuary.

Harrier.—Three on mudflats.

South Island Pied Oystercatcher.—On the mudflats, 150 plus were seen, including a partial albino.

Banded Dotterel.—A count of 55 plus was made but only over a section of the feeding area.

Bar-tailed Godwit.—Six feeding with some South Island pied oystercatchers.

Pied Stilt.—Fifty plus on the mudflats.

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BLACK-BACKED GULL COLONY ON WAIRUNA PEAK.—On November 30, 1952, a friend and I visited a colony of black-backed gulls which is situated on the southerly slope of Wairuna Peak, South Otago. The colony is not far from the top of the peak which is about 1550 feet above sea level and probably 30 miles from the coast itself. On the shady side of the peak there are two or three more or less distinct, vivid green patches totalling perhaps an acre or two, and from a distance flocks of gulls are often to be seen hovering over them or else resting there. On our approach to the lower patch of rank green grass, we startled hundreds of mature gulls into flight and agitated squawking. Every few yards there would be a nest. We could not stand anywhere without seeing a nest within a short range in at least one direction. Some were vacated, but many contained one, two or three eggs. Soon we found that many of the vacated nests were really still being used but that the screaming of the startled parents had sent the chickens to the cover provided by the nearest available lush grass, which was usually right beside the nest. It was quite impossible to estimate just how many young birds there were burrowed in among the grass, and it was with difficulty that we managed to avoid standing on some of them. The young we found in all stages from hatching to chubby birds 6in. or 8in. high. The larger nesting site, 100 yards or so further up the hill, we thought contained a greater number of chicks in proportion to the yet unhatched eggs, and, although most of the chicks seemed to be bigger, we did see some small ones, and, indeed, it was here we watched one push out of its shell. All the nests were made of soft grass.—Haddon Taylor, Dunedin Naturalists' Field Club.

SILVER-EYE'S SONG.—Here is evidence of the silver-eye being an expert imitator. During October, 1952, it was noted that a hedgesparrow was singing lustily every morning in the garden. However, it was not until a closer inspection was made that it was discovered that the bird singing was not a hedgesparrow at all but a silver-eye. While the bird perched in a privet tree he preened and paused at intervals to utter the identical song of the hedgesparrow. Previously there had been a pair of hedgesparrows in the garden, but early in October they were observed in a neighbour's garden where they probably nested.—Noelle Macdonald, Howick.