

KOKAKO NEST, 1952.

By H. R. McKenzie, Clevedon.

A pair of North Island kokako (*Callaeas cinerea wilsoni*) was found building a nest at Moumoukai on December 2 1952, by a party of O.S.N.Z. members: J. D. Mitchell, F. G. Milner and the writer. The site was only seventy yards or so from that of the nest found on Dec. 2, 1950 ("Breeding of Kokako," Notornis, Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 70), so was probably selected by the same pair. Twenty-eight feet up in a tawa tree the nest was precariously placed between some twigs on an upright side-branch and a clump of astelia on the main trunk. F. Murray later wired the branch to the trunk for safety. Again the birds were not shy. During our watching the female carried and arranged the nesting material, making visits as follows: 6.3 a.m., 6.10, 6.15, 6.18, 6.23, 6.26.5, 6.34, 6.41.5. The male was not seen to help with the building. Twice he fed his mate while she was busy at the nest. The food on one occasion was a green berry. He sang only a little at times. The mewing note was heard rather frequently. No attempt was made to view the nest at this early stage for fear of disturbing the birds.

The next visit was made by members: J. W. St. Paul, F. M. and H.R.McK., on Dec. 6, at 7.50 a.m. F.M. made the difficult climb to the nest and found the body of it fully formed, though with only a small quantity of punga scale as yet in the bottom of the cup. We concluded that it was not complete. The birds were not seen. The nest tree grew in a tangle of other trees with much kie-kie and supplejack, a veritable harbour for rats. It was not practicable to tin the trunk so we set traps a few yards away. Frequent visits were precluded by stormy weather, the long distance and the very difficult road, so we planned to return on Dec. 10, thinking that the nest would be finished by then.

A severe storm on Dec. 10 delayed the next visit until Dec. 11th, when F.G.M., F.M. and H.R.McK. arrived at 6.25 p.m. F.M. climbed up and found the bird on the nest. She regarded him calmly at 12 to 18 inches, then left the nest for a little, revealing three eggs. She returned and sat again while F.M. was only two feet distant. We had been wrong in our conclusions of Dec. 6. No further lining had been added, so the nest was really complete on that date. The eggs had been laid between the morning of Dec. 6 and the evening of Dec. 11. Although pleased to find the eggs we were deeply disappointed at our failure to obtain a laying record. On this visit of twenty minutes the male was not seen. The traps had accounted for a rat and a mouse.

To facilitate the watching of the nest, the versatile F.M. now constructed a light "Jacob's Ladder," and this he fixed to a stout branch a few feet below the nest. The lower part of it was rolled up when not in use. I was, of course, very anxious to see the eggs. F.M. tied a rope under my arms, hitched the other end round a branch at the top and kept it taut as his bulky charge made a toilsome and wobbly ascent of the ladder. "We do some mad things," he said feelingly. With the aid of a mirror on a stick I viewed the precious eggs, so rarely seen these days by man.

It was estimated that the hatching would occur between Christmas and New Year, so plans were made for a close watch by several members. On Dec. 26, Rev. R. J. Fenton made the sad discovery of the eggs having been taken. A stoat which had been newly killed by one of the traps was probably the culprit. It may well be that the breeding losses of the kokako occasioned by vermin are 90% or more.

Some apprehension was felt in case the baited traps may have attracted vermin. It was satisfying, therefore, to have from such an authority as member Logan Bell, Senior Field Officer, Wild Life Division, Internal Affairs Dept., the assurance that in his opinion the right course had been adopted. It is hoped that intensive trapping in the area will make for future nesting success for the kokako.