

SUMMARY

A log of bird- and whale sightings is presented, together with a note on water bloom caused by *Trichodesmium Hildebrandtii* Gomont (Cyanophyta: Oscillatoriaceae) in the Java Sea. It is suggested that much could be learned concerning the northerly range of the more easily recognized seabirds, such as the Wandering Albatross, Black-browed Mollymawk, Nelly and Cape Pigeon, by enlisting the aid of interested ships' officers.

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A NOTE ON THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE WEKA (*GALLIRALLUS AUSTRALIS*) IN NORTHLAND

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Between 1932 and 1936 I lived in and around the North in an area bounded by Waipu (about 30 miles south of Whangarei) to the north, and Paparoa, on the Dargaville road about 10 miles from Maungaturoto, to the south. During this time, wekas were frequent and common in this area. In particular, at Waipu, where I lived on a farm for some months in 1932, and again in 1933 and 1934, wekas appeared to be numerous. This, I

judged, purely from their calls which I knew well enough. The farm concerned was of hilly country, running to a good deal of scrub, including much manuka, with some small swamps and small scattered patches of native timber. The property was intersected by a number of streams, drains, and other watercourses.

The noisy evidence of the existence of the wekas was most noticeable in the early evening, and during the night hours. In fact, it was customary for the early evening hours – say, from dusk till some hours later – to be quite filled with the weka calls, which appeared to come from all directions around the farm. I am quite sure that there was not just one isolated group – it was possible to find oneself close to a weka or wekas in any direction if one took a walk from the farmhouse about dusk onwards.

I cannot more accurately describe the call than as a thin, fairly high-pitched ‘weeek! weeek! weeek!’ which seemed to sound all round the hills. There was one variation, perhaps two, to this: one, I think, was a sort of ‘thumping drumming’ noise. I remember my brother complaining that a sudden outbreak of this noise close to his ear on a scrub-fringed bank, when he was returning late with cows, had given him a sharp start in the early dark. I remember agreeing with my brother that the wekas, as we had listened to them, evidently had a third variation to their call, but what form this took I cannot now remember.

I am fairly certain that the volume of sound was maintained throughout the year. The owner of the farm, Mr Murdoch McLeod, now in retirement at Waipu, assured me that the wekas had always been in the district in quantity during his memory, which at that time would be at least forty years. These notes refer to the period 1932-1934. During 1933 I spent some time at Taipuha (on the North railway about twelve miles inland from Waipu). Wekas were in evidence here also. Once, or twice, I caught sight of one or two in drains on the farm – as you can imagine, I was not given much time for prolonged observation, but the description given in Moncrieff's *New Zealand Birds* corresponds with my recollection. In 1935, wekas could also be heard in Paparoa, and it was here that I sighted a weka with young – from recollection about four in number – but there may have been more than one family. This was quite close to the local hospital – almost in the back yard – and the birds were therefore moving about in a semi-built-up area which included cats, rats, dogs, etc. Recollection as to the time of year is very hazy, but it is most likely to have been during late spring or summer, as I do remember that the task upon which I was engaged would not have been done in winter.

When I left the North in 1936, the wekas, judged by volume of sound, were continuing more or less undiminished. I returned in 1939 and 1941 for short visits; and it was on one of these visits – unfortunately I cannot remember which, but think 1941 more probable – that I was astonished to notice no weka calls in the evening. I discussed the matter with my farmer-host, Mr McLeod, and he stated that, so far as he could tell, they had disappeared quite suddenly. No changes had taken place in the surrounding land – all was as before – and nobody in the district could offer me any explanation for their disappearance. The only suggestion put forward – not very profitable as far as I could judge – was that rabbits in the district had also diminished or disappeared at about the same time. This was suggested by one or two farmers in the district, but there was nothing very definite to work on.

From 1936, then, I neither saw nor heard a weka until I went to Gisborne in April 1945, when I was astonished to hear a weka call in a small swamp right in the middle of a busy housing area within a few minutes' walk of the centre of the town. I heard these wekas occasionally, but was never in the country areas so cannot say whether they were strong in the rural parts or not.

I hope these scrappy and quite ‘unscientific’ recollections may be of some interest.