

## PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF THE STITCHBIRD

These photographs of the male and female Stitchbird (*Notiomystis cincta*) at their nesting-hole were taken by Mr C. H. Parkin, the caretaker of Little Barrier Island, which is now the last stronghold of this beautiful honeyeater. Fortunately Stitchbirds are now widely distributed on Little Barrier and may be found at all heights from sea level to the ridges near the summit (2378ft) (v. N.Z.B.N. 2, pp. 142-143); and there is little doubt that the species has much increased since Reischek (v. *Yesterdays in Maoriland*, pp. 83-93) wrote his graphic account of his adventures in search of Pogonornis — as the Stitchbird was then called — in the 1880's, before Little Barrier was proclaimed a sanctuary in 1896.

The nest of the Stitchbird has not often been found. In 1919 Guthrie-Smith spent ten weeks on Little Barrier between October and December; and towards the end of his stay succeeded in finding five nests. 'Of these, three were built thirty to sixty feet from the ground in huge puriri; the fourth in an immense taraire, also about fifty feet from the ground; the fifth was at a lower elevation and in a smaller tree — a tawa.' As an account of one of our rarest birds, the chapter in *Bird Life on Island and Shore* which Guthrie-Smith devoted to the Stitchbird, and which he illustrated by some remarkably skilful photographs, is a *locus classicus*. He believed that 'a big proportion of the nests are placed almost beyond eyeshot'. More than a quarter of a century was to elapse before the next nest was found. Then on 4/1/48, as described in N.Z.B.N. 3, p. 154, M. C. Hanna and B. D. Heather found Stitchbirds feeding young in an old Kingfisher hole, at a height of only 8ft 6in, in a pohutukawa.

Mr Parkin has sent some notes on the nest at which these latest photographs were taken. It was found on 21/12/55 by Mr K. V. Bigwood, of the National Publicity Studios. The parents were feeding small young. The nest was not in an easy position for photography, being 23ft 9in above ground level in a pohutukawa which was growing out of a steep slope. With the help of Mr Parkin a platform was built and a hide erected, so that before Mr Bigwood left on Christmas Eve he had secured a fine series of pictures, both still and moving, in colour. After his departure Mr and Mrs Parkin spent many hours spread over eight days at the nest. The number of young could not be counted, as the hole had a right-angled bend. According to Mr Parkin 'on 3 January at 9.45 a.m. the cock bird arrived and remained in the nesting-hole for four minutes. Apparently the young had left early that morning and he had come for a final look round. We did not see the young, and did not know how many. The period of fledging is not less than a fortnight.'

[Ed.]



1. Cock Stitchbird outside nesting-hole in pohutukawa.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY C. H. PARKIN



2. Female Stitchbird. The angle of the tail is characteristic.



3. *Male Stitchbird leaving the nest.*



4. Female Stitchbird leaving the nest.