

Spotted Shag (*Stictocarbo punctatus*). 29/11/53. 41 adults flying. Two nests intact, one with two almost fully grown chicks. 21/2/54. c. 130 adults flying around the island. 21/9/54. 6 adults. 30/10/54. c. 45 adults. Three nests.

White-fronted Tern (*Sterna striata*). 29/11/53. Nests 112. Chicks 12. One nest contained three eggs, 12 nests two eggs each. During the winter very few terns were about. They were again plentiful by early October.

Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). A pair bred in a short rocky burrow.

There is very little soil except a few pockets of rotted down guano and I could not find any petrel burrows. On 21/9/54 at least eight seals were seen and two geckos were found among the rocks.

A. T. WIGHTMAN

WAX-EYES TAKEN AS FOOD BY WHITE HERON

It is no uncommon thing to find small birds so gorged with food that they are temporarily unable to fly properly. I have more than once handled Goldfinches (*Carduelis carduelis*) in this condition. Wax-eyes (*Zosterops lateralis*) will glut themselves with mutton fat which in Westland is commonly kept in large tins in timber yards. Some years ago a White Heron (*E. alba*) used to frequent one such timber yard near Whataroa. It would stand quietly by the tin, seizing and swallowing those Wax-eyes whom gluttony had rendered incapable of escaping. This continued for some months, the Wax-eyes never seeming to learn that the White Heron was their enemy.

J. G. PENNIKET

HARRIER ATTACKING BITTERN

The degree to which the Harrier (*C. approximans*) preys on other birds has been the subject of much controversy, so the following note is pertinent. On 8/11/55 I observed a Bittern (*B. poiciloptilus*) in flight under attack by a Harrier at Lake Hayes. The Harrier dived at the Bittern continually and gradually forced it to lose height. At each swoop it struck with its talons, but the Bittern parried with its bill every time. The fight lasted for ten minutes until the Bittern made the shore-line and escaped.

M. M. SMALL

'CRESTED' BELLBIRDS

While investigating the alleged appearance of a Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) in this (Rotorua) area, several reports of the occurrence of a strange bird have come to my notice.

Three boys who visited the Auckland Museum during the Christmas holidays, after viewing the specimens of Bulbul on exhibition there, declared to the attendant that they had seen the same bird near Lake Rotoiti. Unfortunately Mr Turbott was away at the time of their visit, otherwise the matter would doubtless have been cleared up then and there. One of the boys left a Rotorua address with the attendant, which proved to be incorrect, and all subsequent efforts to trace the lad at Mr Turbott's request have proved futile. I have little doubt, however, that the supposed Bulbul was none other than a Bellbird (*Anthornis melanura*) wearing a temporary head adornment.

During last November and early December when the flax (*Phormium*) is in bloom, the nectar-loving Bellbird pays much attention to this plant, a fact that is generally well known. In the process of extracting the nectar from the flax flowers, the bird's head comes into contact with the dark-red — almost purple — pollen, and on withdrawing the bill a certain amount of nectar adheres to the inside walls of the 'petals'. The next bird visiting the same flower contacts both pollen and nectar, and on withdrawing the head, the feathers of forehead and crown are thus raised, giving the impression of a crest or tuft on the bird's head. I have noticed the same effect on the heads of Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) and Silvereye (*Zosterops lateralis*). The act of withdrawing the bill bends the head feathers forward, and these being dusted with pollen and smeared with nectar — a combination

possessing the properties of mucilage — the feathering would remain erect for some time.

Early in last December Mr Roy Hendren, a bus driver, informed me that he had seen that day a strange bird 'like a Bellbird' (which species he knew well), but the head had 'a red horny plate like a Pukeko's, with a few feathers sticking up at the back'. On my interrogating him, he disclosed that the bird was resting on a 'korari' (flax stem).

In this instance the compound of nectar and pollen had formed an excrescence on the forehead and crown, some occipital feathers being erect and apparently stiff.

M. S. BLACK

FERNBIRDS ON THE GOULAND DOWNS

My wife and I spent Easter 1956 at the Goulund Downs, using the hut at the head of the Aorere Valley in the Collingwood County. About fifty yards from the hut I found a pair of Fernbirds, (*Bowdleria punctata*) feeding in the snowgrass, but it was not until the next day that I was able to watch them closely. They were near a streamlet about thirty yards from where I first saw them; and as I sat quietly it was not long before they would approach to within about a foot of me. One bird seemed to have only five tail feathers. Their sharp 'pit' call was quite clear, and not the 'utick' as mentioned in some books. This 'pit' call was used only occasionally, but most of the time they would communicate by puffing up the throat and then uttering a throaty muffled purring sound.

Once they had become accustomed to my presence, they fed freely on the tender shoots of the snowgrass and every now and then they would take turns at having a bath in a shrub-covered pool. After a bath they would hop into a small shrub, preen themselves and start feeding. On one occasion a blue-bottle flew off my knee and one of the Fernbirds made an attempt to catch it. A short while later I saw the other bird find and eat a brown caterpillar $\frac{1}{2}$ in. long. Although the Fernbirds cannot move a great distance in one burst, they are quick and can change direction freely, being especially at home in the snowgrass. They part the grass with their heads and perch themselves by hanging onto the stalks on either side of the body with feet split sideways.

About half an hour after making these observations I was chopping wood outside the hut and found a half-developed huhu type of grub, $\frac{1}{2}$ in. long, with which I decided to test the birds. Returning to the spot where the birds were feeding, I first tried them out by putting the grub on a white handkerchief, but no notice was taken; so waiting my chance, I threw the grub to one of the birds in the open. As soon as the grub moved the bird seized it. After killing it the Fernbird juggled with the grub until it was end on, and then swallowed it.

Fernbirds appear to be quite numerous in this area. They keep very close to the ground. Their flight is rather weak and the longest flutter was about twenty feet at a height of about four feet. I once saw a pair sitting in stunted beech trees about six feet off the ground.

M. J. BREEN

NATIVE BIRD LIFE IN A PINE PLANTATION

On the 4/3/56 I obtained permission to visit a pine plantation known as Fail's Forest, ten miles from Taupo. The ranger, Mr A. Bailey, conducted a friend and myself through the plantation. For the first few miles no birds were visible, although on two occasions, when Mr Bailey stopped the truck, we heard Whiteheads in the distance.

It was not until we had penetrated twelve miles into the heart of the plantation that we actually saw them. Quite suddenly, it seemed, the loud twittering of a considerable number of birds could be heard above the engine of the truck. We stopped and got out. There were birds on every tree around us: Silvereyes, Grey Warblers, Fantails, Tomtits, Bush Robins and a flock of Whiteheads. Never before have I seen such a large con-