

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-

centration of small native birds. There must have been at least fifty or sixty birds visible, and, judging from the noise, many more hidden in the tree tops. The birds did not appear to be at all agitated by our presence. Several Robins, Fantails and Tomtits came closer to inspect us. The birds were feeding on insects in the higher branches of the trees. Although it was mid-morning, the animated conversation of the birds was comparable to that heard in the dawn.

Upon enquiry, I learned that this particular area, where the birds were concentrated, was six miles from the nearest native forest, Te Apuahou, and eight miles from Tauhara Mt. Te Apuahou Forest consists mainly of Five-finger, Rewarewa, Whau, Tutu, all second growth, as fire destroyed that stretch of forest some years ago. The plantation at the spot where I observed the birds consisted of *Pinus radiata* and was planted in 1932. There was scarcely any native growth visible in the fire-breaks, which are bulldozed fairly regularly. In another part of the forest we saw a large flock of Silvereyes feeding high up in the trees.

On our return journey I observed two Blackbirds, a Song-thrush and several Pipits on the outskirts of the plantation.

Mrs AVIS ACRES

BIRDS ON TRAWLER 'THOMAS CURRELL' IN COOK STRAIT

During a period of fog and drizzle between 10 and 13 April 1956 a number of land birds appeared aboard the trawler 'Thomas Currell' when she was operating between Cape Campbell and Kaikoura. Some sea birds also came on board. Details were as follows —

10 April: Position seven to ten miles off Welds Cone, eight miles south of Cape Campbell; light drizzle. Lying to, awaiting daylight to start fishing operations. Four Fairy Prions came on board between 8 p.m. and midnight.

11 April: Position three to four miles off, steaming south towards Kaikoura; thick fog over land. At 9.30 a.m. eight small birds, which appeared to be Goldfinches, flew by in an erratic manner and disappeared in a southerly direction. At 11 a.m. seven more small birds, this time definitely Goldfinches, circled the vessel, and then, after appearing to be about to settle, made off to the south.

12 April: Position four to six miles off, just north of Kaikoura; intermittent fog, thick over the land. A Fantail came on board at 9 a.m. and seemed to be very exhausted; its tail feathers were wet. It immediately drank salt water and died some three hours later.

Between 8 p.m. and midnight several land birds were seen flying about the vessel in the glare of the deck lights, and their call notes could be clearly heard. Two Fairy Prions and a Diving Petrel came on board during this time.

13 April: Position five to eight miles off and south of Cape Campbell; fog cleared at noon. At 7 a.m. a Song-thrush, a Goldfinch and two Pipits or Skylarks were on board.

Observations of the above type are not unusual aboard 'Thomas Currell'. In rainy weather or in fog, the birds seem to get dazzled by the deck lights. Prions and Storm Petrels are the most common of the sea birds, and Diving Petrels appear occasionally. When found the birds are gathered up and placed in the lifeboat, where they remain until the first sign of daylight; then they fly away. On occasions land birds have stayed about the ship for two or three days when fog or rain has persisted.

F. ABERNETHY

POMARINE SKUA AT WAIKANAE

On 26 April 1953 we twice saw a large *Stercorarius* Skua chasing a Caspian Tern up the meandering tidal estuary of Waikanae River. The Skua appeared larger than the Caspian, and had projecting central tail feathers, conspicuously longer than the rest. The projecting feathers were broad and