

addition to a considerable number of unoccupied mounds' (Robertson and Wodzicki, 1948). However, it probably means that all available nesting space is occupied early in each season.

The slopes surrounding this colony were honeycombed with 'mutton bird' burrows, and though some signs of fresh activity were seen, the few burrows examined were empty. This was surprising as Oliver (1913, 1955) found that *Pterodroma macroptera gouldi*, the common breeding petrel of White Island, had nearly fully fledged young in December 1912.

Rocky Point: N.Z. Gannetry No. 23.

These nesting areas were examined from the sea and gannetries A, B and C were fully occupied, the roosting area D not being seen.

The West Point Gannetry (No. 22) was not examined and there were no birds at the abandoned Dam site (No. 25).

These observations add additional evidence for the later egg laying period of the White Island Gannetries suggested by Oliver (1955).

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— J. C. YALDWYN

A NOTE ON GREY DUCKS BREEDING AT MIHI, IN THE ROTORUA-TAUPO AREA

Mihi is a little known district, half-way between Rotorua and Taupo, about a mile or so from the main highway. It is a thermal area with an extremely active boiling pool, a number of mud pools, fumeroles and the like scattered in the rough mixed manuka and pine bush. The area concerned is a couple of hundred yards from the Waikato River and includes a small Maori settlement.

On 30 August, with Mr P. A. F. Lewis, of Rotorua, I was exploring the thermal activities on a rough silica patch, when a large bird took off from under a small but compact clump of tea-tree scrub. Investigation revealed a nest of ten eggs, typically those of a Grey Duck, with breast-feather lining, etcetera. The nest was left undisturbed.

On 9 September, accompanied by Mr M. S. Black, of Rotorua, we returned to this spot for further observations. As our car passed down the side road into Mihi, a clutch of ten young ducklings, recently hatched, appeared on the low bank at the side of the road. They had obviously been shepherded there, and as we watched they fluttered to the road, crossed it right in front of the stationary car, and with the parent bird in attendance made for a small swampy area. Our arrival at this time was providential for the ducks, as well as being an astonishing coincidence. Some Maori youngsters spotted the ducklings, cut them off from the parent bird and splashed into the swamp after them. The parent bird flew over a low hummock and the lads were somewhat peremptorily driven off by shouts and threats from our party.

The subsequent developments were interesting. The parent duck flew up and down, gradually losing height until she landed in a small shallow stretch of water just out of sight over a low hill. From this position she flapped in and out of sight several times. The main body of the ducklings soon got their bearings and in a compact little knot made towards her. Presumably to get their directions, they stopped in a body from time to time, then set off again and presently disappeared over the hill. One laggard, separated from the main group, appeared to have no chance of catching the others, but to our surprise the parent bird, after attending to the main party, came back up the slope and waited, just in view, until this last member of the family reached her, taking several minutes in his journey of numerous short dashes and pauses. My

previous experiences of this nature had given me the impression that parent birds are satisfied so long as they have some of their flock. That this bird should be aware of, and wait for, a straggler among the rushes, etcetera, several hundred yards away, surprised me. When last seen, the ducks were safely on their way to the river. The parent, incidentally, was accompanied by another female in fairly close attendance.

Since this family of ducks had come from the immediate direction of the previously recorded nest, we had little doubt that they were from it, but investigation proved that this was not so. The nest, we found, had been raided, probably by rats. Five of the eggs had been pierced and broken at the ends, the remainder were intact. Incubation was at the stage of about one week to ten days.

If there is anything of interest in all this, it may be: (a) confirmation of the fact that two ducks nested in fairly close proximity — available cover would probably indicate nests within two hundred yards of each other; (b) no cold water in the immediate vicinity, but numerous hot pools, mud pools, fumeroles, etcetera, which apparently made no difference to breeding operations. The presence of the 'spare' female also gives rise to the speculation that this bird, deprived of her clutch, had attached herself to the family described.

— F. E. GEE

LITTLE EGRET NEAR NELSON

On 19 and 20 November 1955, at the mouth of the Waimea River, near Nelson, I saw a Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*). The bird was very difficult to approach because when disturbed it associated with a group of ten of the notoriously shy White-faced Heron (*N. novaehollandiae*). It was seen with 9x binoculars in both dull and sunny light.

It was white, with wholly black bill and legs. Yellow webs were glimpsed once during a take-off, but facial skin colour could not be determined. Long crest and scapular, but no pectoral plumes, were seen. The white phase of the Reef Heron (*E. sacra*) would have much shorter, lighter-coloured legs, yellow bill, more stolid stance, and no long crest or scapular plumes.

On the ground the Little Egret was virtually as tall as a White-faced Heron, but appreciably smaller in body size. In flight it was not obviously smaller than a White-faced Heron, but the wing seemed broader and more rounded. (This may be an illusion from the longitudinal black and grey pattern of the wing of the White-faced Heron.) The beat was faster and flight therefore less undulating.

A White Heron (*E. alba*) seen at Takaka on 23 November was obviously larger and heavier than the White-faced Herons near it.

— B. D. HEATHER

COLONY OF BLACK-BILLED GULLS

A sizable colony of Black-billed Gulls (*L. bulleri*) is situated in the Cardrona River valley, Central Otago, about five miles upstream from the bridge across the river on the Wanaka-Cromwell highway. Local reports and evidence confirm that it is a regular nesting-site which has been in use for at least 'several' seasons.

On 10/11/56 there were an estimated 700-800 nests. These were scattered in two groups, one on the east bank of the river and the other on an adjacent island. In the first group only one nest contained a chick, while in the second about one-third of all nests contained chicks, some of which were developing quills and could run (and swim) quite strongly.

The nests were chiefly made of straw, dry grass, rootlets, feathers and odd leaves. Most were scattered at random, one to three feet apart, on the shingly riverbed, but many were grouped around clumps of the leafy tobacco weed, or among a pile of drift debris.