

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.

Of the 260 nests in the first group the following is the analysis of clutch sizes on the above date:

Eggs:	0	1	2	3	4
Nests:	8	52	185	13	1

plus 1 nest containing 1 chick

The average size of 11 eggs measured was 50.9 x 37.0 mm. One abnormal egg, 29.0 x 24.1, was found in a nest with a normal one, 51.9 x 36.0.

On the following day a pair of Grey Duck, a pair of Paradise Duck, and a Black-backed Gull were feeding in and near the stream; a large immature Black-backed was harassing the colony and constantly being chased by adult Black-bills.

Pied Oyster-catchers, Pied Stilts, Banded Dotterels and Black-fronted Terns also nest in the vicinity.

— P. CHILD

BLACK-FRONTED DOTTEREL IN CANTERBURY

I have been interested in recent reports by Brathwaite and Andrew (*Notornis* 6, 146 and 185; 7, 57) of the Australian Black-fronted Dotterel (*Charadrius melanops*) in the North Island. I can now add a South Island record.

Some time in April 1956 Mr Bruce Todd saw at Leithfield Beach, North Canterbury, a plover of a kind which he knew he had never seen before. It was feeding in very shallow water. He was able to photograph the bird on colour film and obtained some fairly close shots with a telephoto lens. Subsequently the film was twice run through for my benefit. The orange bill was very evident in some of the photos and the rest of the bird answered well to the written description. I have no doubt about the identification.

— R. J. SCARLETT

NORTH ISLAND ROBIN 'ANTING'

On 31/12/56, returning from the summit of Kapiti down the track leading to the caretaker's house, I noticed a male North Island Robin (*P. australis longipes*) repeatedly picking up something from the track; and performing unusual movements. I soon realized that the bird was 'anting'.

It was turning over dry leaves lying on the ground and picking up ants from underneath and stroking them along the edges of its primaries. The right and left wing were each treated alternately and the feathers stroked from both sides. I was very sorry that owing to the large group of people I was leading, and the short time available, I could not stop long enough, and had to move on, flushing the bird after a short time. The picking up of ants and stroking them along the wings alternately was repeated eight times during the short time of observation. Sometimes one ant was used for both wings, and at other times a fresh ant was picked up after it was used on one wing only.

This was the first time I ever saw a bird anting, and it was therefore of special interest to me.

— F. C. KINSKY

LONG-TAILED CUCKOO AND HOUSE SPARROW

On 29/12/56, a Long-tailed Cuckoo (*Eudynamis taitensis*) was observed stealing a naked chick out of a House Sparrow's nest in the top of a kanuka tree near our kitchen tent. (The camp was on Webber's property at the north end of Kapiti Island.) The next day a second chick was taken from this nest by a Long-tailed Cuckoo.

On 4/1/57, at about 7 p.m., I observed a Long-tailed Cuckoo settling in the same tree, and moving from branch to branch approaching the sparrow's nest. Perched on a small branch just outside the nest opening, the Cuckoo pushed its head and half of its body into the nest (I thought it was looking for another chick), and after a short while flew off and returned to the bush