

their immature birds which did the same and within two minutes four of the five Grey Ducklings had been sunk without trace — indeed, one at least was held beneath the water's surface by a Paradise Duck until it drowned.

Throughout all this the parent Grey Duck stayed where it was and could not be heard even to utter a protest, though its bill was open at times. The surviving duckling then made off to shore again and was soon in the shelter of the marginal vegetation.

I was rather surprised by the ferocity of the attack and prompted to wonder whether Paradise Ducks, which are almost always present on the lake, have been responsible for attacks on other species in the past — for example, N.Z. Scaup and Blue Duck which are often to be seen either on the lake or, in the case of the Blue Duck, in the Tunnel Burn.

— G. R. WILLIAMS

[According to Delacour (*Waterfowl of the World*, I, p. 246), Paradise Shelducks in captivity are notorious for their exceedingly bad temper! — Ed.]

COOT ON THE HEATHCOTE RIVER

On 28/3/57 I saw an Australian Coot (*Fulica atra australis*) swimming in the Heathcote River at St Martins, Christchurch. I was informed about it nearly three weeks ago when it was further down the river; and from the description given me then, presumed it was a stray Dabchick. When I found the Coot it was half a mile further up the river from where it was first reported. It was swimming with Grey Ducks and Mallard, nearby being two Mute Swans (*C. olor*) and a domestic goose. The Coot was rather timid, but appeared to be in good health, its plumage being quite bright.

G. GUY

A ROCK WREN'S NEST ON THE MACKINNON PASS

For some seasons I have been guiding on the Milford Track. Prompted by Guthrie-Smith's account (*Sorrows and Joys of a New Zealand Naturalist*, pp. 143-148) of the nest of a Rock Wren (*Xenicus gilviventris*) which he found on the Mackinnon Pass some twenty years ago, I decided to search that area again and succeeded in finding a nest in November 1956.

25/11/56. About 150 yards from the top of the zig-zags at the eastern end of the pass Mr Roy Kelly and I came across a female Rock Wren. She hopped among the tussock for a while at the edge of the track, then flew up on to a big outcrop of rock. She hopped and flitted around there fussily, disappearing and reappearing but sticking to the immediate area. The male bird appeared from the direction in which we had come and gradually approached. He seemed distressed at our being there, but after a minute or so he worked his way along through the scrub around the edge of the rock. Finally after some minutes he disappeared behind a 'lily' leaf and behind the *Dracophyllum*. The female in the meantime had disappeared over the top of the rock. We were at a distance of about fifteen feet from where the male bird disappeared, so after waiting a couple of minutes to ascertain whether he was staying where he was — presumably on the nest — and not wishing to disturb them too much, we carried on over the pass to the monument.

On the way back I went within a couple of feet and saw the entrance hole. Both birds flew from the nest when I approached. The nest was placed in the roots of a rocky outcrop. It was well hidden, with the entrance behind a small bush of *Dracophyllum uniflorum*. Two mountain daisies (*Celmisia coriacea*) and a mountain buttercup (*Ranunculus lyalli*) grew alongside; a patch of foliose lichen and moss grew thickly on the rock. The nest itself was well constructed and compact. Dry strips of *Astelia* and snowgrass (*Danthonia*) were the main materials. One strong 'guy rope' of *Danthonia* was woven into the top of the entrance hole. This 'guy rope' went straight out from the nest through the small *Dracophyllum* and bent downwards at right angles. Moss, lichen and some feathers were interwoven while a few feathers lined the nest. The feathers used were Kea and Kiwi. Feathers were used sparingly.

30/11/56. Both birds left the nest as I passed on the way up. There was no noise from youngsters. On the way back down off the pass there was no sign of parent birds.

2/12/56. There was a fair coating of snow over the pass including the area where the nest was. No sign of parent birds either on trip up or down. There was a drift of snow about four feet deep in front of the nest, so I did not look inside.

5/12/56. When within a few feet of the nest I was happy to know that snow had not affected the birds as I heard a faint 'peep, peep, peep'. There were three chicks that I could see, or rather one neck and head nearest the entrance hole and two more heads lower down and further back in the nest. As far as I could see, they were bald on head and neck and still had their eyes shut. They could have been a day or two old by their size and the one nearest the entrance was stretching up its neck although not opening its beak. There was only one parent bird near the nest that I could see. On the way up, however, I saw one Rock Wren just above Moraine Creek, three-quarters of a mile below the nest. I could not think that it was one of the nesting pair, so far away when they have such poor powers of flight. No doubt it was one of another pair.

9/12/56. There was no sign of the parents on the way up. I had a look in at the nest but the entrance hole was blocked from the inside by a Kea breast feather. Although I couldn't see the chicks they appeared to be lively, making a bit of a noise, and there was much movement within the nest. On the way down I was with one of the tourists and we saw one of the parent birds, with an insect, waiting to enter the nest. It was somewhat distressed at our presence, so we moved on.

12/12/56. Whether it has any bearing or not on the disappearance of the chicks, I must now mention the behaviour of a Kea which I met on the way up. About 250 yards down from the Rock Wren's nest this Kea came gliding in and landed on a flat rock about ten feet away. It was limping round on a damaged foot with its two back toes curled forward. There was a ribbonwood beside the rock and the Kea started nipping off the ends of the shoots about three inches long, nibbling and then dropping them. I watched for a while, then walked on, with the Kea keeping pace, a bit behind or ahead. When we reached the nest the Kea was ahead and landed on a flattish rock four to six feet away from the wren's nest. He appeared to be excited, hopping around in circles, calling out, cocking his head to one side and peering towards where the nest was. When I had a look into the nest it was empty. There had been hardly enough time for the chicks to mature even if they were ten days old. There was no sign of chicks or of parent birds. On consideration later on, I thought the entrance hole appeared enlarged.

When there had been no sign of the birds for about a fortnight, I took the nest and sent it to the Southland Museum. Its measurements were: horizontal circumference, 15 inches; vertical circumference, 14 inches; diameter of enlarged entrance, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches, but about one inch at first. It appears to be considerably smaller than the nest which Guthrie-Smith discovered and dissected.

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