

It may be significant that all these instances of S.I.P.O.'s forsaking the tideline occurred at a season when the bulk of the population is moving inland in the South Island or is already breeding on the riverbeds.

R. B. SIBSON

NESTING WHITE-FACED HERON, WAIKANAE, 1956

White-faced Herons have become regular at Waikanae during the past 10 years and probably bred before nests were first observed. Up to seven, perhaps more, have been seen together. Mr H. V. Olliver, local Acclimatisation Society ranger, located single nests in tall pines beside Waikanae River in 1954 and 1955, and nearby residents reported in early spring that herons picked up fallen cabbage-tree leaves and flew off with them.

On 14 September 1956 Mr Eric Weggery reported nesting on his property a good deal further upstream than previous sites. Up to 4 birds had been seen near the 70ft pine in which he eventually found a nest. The tree is the westernmost in a shelter-belt separating pastured terraces and dunelands from low river flood-plain with willows and poplars. It is 50 yards from the river, about a mile from the coast. The nest was about 45ft up, barely visible from below through a confusing network of twigs and branches when the observer lay prone beside the unclimbable main trunk.

No adults were about at 10 a.m. on 15 September, but preening movements of grey birds could be seen through gaps in the nest, and odd down feathers floated down. The nest seemed to be lined with dead poplar leaves from flood debris. Once a pair of herons flew downstream above the pines and croaked as they passed the nest, and later a single bird flew towards the nest but veered off without perching, calling loudly. On 23 September, 6.30 a.m., a heron flew out of the nest tree and lazily away, and another passed over 15 minutes later. Nest occupants now showed themselves as two well-grown fledglings; one wandering 18 inches from the nest, with a white hairy-looking head, otherwise fully fledged, with young quill feathers in its wings, which it exercised freely, its companion remaining barely visible on the nest. The birds pecked off pine needles and nest leaves and let them fall. On 29 September, 8.30 a.m., the nest was empty, but two fledglings sat together six feet away. On 6 October, 5.30 p.m., they sat together on a branch about 12 feet from the deserted nest. The tree was quite deserted on 13 October, but three herons were feeding on a nearby backwater pond and flew down the river when disturbed. It is suspected, but not proved, that more than one nest was occupied on the Waikanae River in 1956.

C. A. FLEMING

UNUSUAL MOVEMENT OF SPOTTED SHAGS ON OTAGO HARBOUR

During the week 12-18 May, Dunedin and Otago generally experienced extremely wet and stormy weather. The following week was, by comparison, calm and pleasant, and the following bird movement was noted daily by a number of people.

Small flocks of Spotted Shags (*Phalacrocorax punctatus*) flew up the Otago Harbour from low water till full tide. On the falling tide these birds, in the company of a few Red-billed Gulls and some Black-backed Gulls, drifted down the harbour with the tide, feeding on some marine creatures. The feeding area would be not more than half an acre in extent and only in the deep water of the channel (W.A.W.). The feeding pattern was simple. Shags would dive and, on coming to the surface, swim with the flock until diving again. Birds which lagged behind for a few yards would flap their wings dry while sitting on the water and then fly to the front of the flock, there to land and dive again.

The number of Red-billed Gulls was noticeably small (W.A.W.), not more than 100, and not more than a dozen Black-backed Gulls were seen with the flock on the one occasion that W.A.W. had it under observation,

and 125 Spotted Shags were counted as the 'raft' drifted past across a line. That there were at least 150 birds would be a conservative estimate, as diving was going on as they passed. In 16 years I have never seen anything like this (W.A.W.).

L.E.W. observed these 'rafts' on 23, 24 and 25 May. Mostly they consisted of 150 to 200 shags, but on 25 May a very large 'raft' drifted from near the Southern Endowment to the main channel near the Oil Berth. It was impossible to make an accurate count, due to the taking off and alighting of the birds and the packed mass of the raft itself, but a thousand shags would be a conservative estimate of the number in this 'raft' together with about 150 Black-backed Gulls. If a launch arrived close to the birds, they rose in front of it and immediately settled behind it. In some instances the 'rafts' drifted right up into the steamer basin. It appeared that once feeding was exhausted in one area, the birds in front lifted one by one and settled in a new position, often quite some distance away. Gradually the birds took off until eventually the whole mass had shifted and was now feeding in the new area. Sometimes long lines of shags could be seen moving to another feeding ground. Then they would settle on the water and the whole procedure would be repeated.

The master of the tug *Otago* told L.E.W. that in all the years of his experience on Otago Harbour he had never seen such a congregation of shags. He added that they were feeding on a species of small fish (unidentified) and that the Black-backed Gulls were enjoying some free feeds by annoying the shags so much that the shags disgorged the fish.

Renewed rough weather from 27 May broke up any further runs.

L. E. WALKER, W. A. WILLIAMSON

AUSTRALIAN BARN OWL IN WESTLAND

The first New Zealand record of the Australian Barn Owl (*Tyto alba delicatula*) was from Barrytown, Westland, in August 1947 (Falla, 1948). The present, apparently the second such observation, was about one mile south of the Haast River mouth, and one half-mile from the sea. In October or November 1955, J. Buchanan and his father, both residents of Okura, struck an owl down with their car as it rose ahead of them from the road, with a black rat in its talons. The bird was then examined and found to be larger than the Morepork and of considerably lighter colour. No one in Okura township, including the schoolmaster, had ever seen anything like it. With Mr F. Delaney, who was also curious about the bird, J. Buchanan recently visited the Dominion Museum, where he had the chance to discuss briefly the birds of this area. In describing the owl to us he was very clear on the following points: (1) it was much larger than the Morepork; (2) it was lighter in colour than either the Morepork or the German Owl; (3) it had very large white eyes with a darkish ring about them; and (4) although the breast was light, there were small dark spots on it. This description was confirmed in writing by H. J. Buchanan (letter, 15 June 1957). J. Buchanan was shown several birds in the study collection. First the Morepork, which he instantly recognised. Next the Laughing Owl (a specimen with a light face), which he not only did not recognise, but pointed out the differences between the Laughing Owl specimen and the bird that he had seen. Finally, he was shown a miscellaneous collection of owls from outside New Zealand and he unhesitatingly pointed to the Barn Owl, lying in a box containing several other species of owls all larger than any New Zealand owl. On this and on still another (mounted) specimen he pointed out the special points mentioned above which he had observed for several days (before the carcass had to be disposed of) in the Westland casualty. We, therefore, have no hesitation in putting on record the occurrence of the Australian Barn Owl one mile south of the Haast River near its mouth.

This specimen is of interest in that it is another example of the process of steady drift to New Zealand of even more birds from Australia. We suspect that, with numbers of bird-watchers increasing, such records of stragglers will increase.