

## PHOTOGRAPHING THE STEWART ISLAND KIWI

By M. F. SOPER

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Through the kindness of Mr. Roy Traill, I was able to spend four nights in August near the nest of a Stewart Island Kiwi (*Apteryx australis lawryi*) which he had discovered, and to take some photographs, most of which unfortunately were spoiled in the darkroom.

The nesting burrow was on a slope in a very open piece of bush. There were two main tracks leading to it, which had been kept clear of all fallen twigs and larger leaves. The burrow was about 12 feet long with an angle of 135° about 8 feet from the entrance. It started at the roots of a small tree-fern and except for its size looked like the mouth of a rabbit hole. According to Mr. Traill, the single egg was still unhatched the week before we arrived; so we estimate that the chick was 5-10 days old when we saw it.

Just at dusk, when it was almost but not quite too dark to see, the off-nest bird would come galloping through the bush, making the ground tremble with its heavy feet. It would stop about 12 feet from the burrow and call. This bird, from its call, I judged to be the male each night. As it did not always come from the same direction, it presumably had two or more lairs for holing up during the daytime. At any rate this bird did not occupy the burrow with the other parent (female?) and the chick. The bird in the burrow would come out and answer; and they would both depart into the darkness. One of the birds would return about every three quarters of an hour and enter the burrow, remaining inside for about half an hour. No food was seen in its bill. It should be said that we had a low-power electric torch with a red bulb suspended over the entrance to the burrow.

The chick was seen on two nights. It would come and probe about the entrance and scuttle back at the slightest noise. If the red light was too bright it would not come out at all, but come to the edge of the light circle and no further.

One night a third kiwi appeared just at dusk at the start of the night's activity. The off-nest parent (male?) called. Then this third kiwi appeared from the opposite direction, ran down the main track and tried to enter the burrow, just as the parent on the nest was emerging. What followed was dramatic in its violence and suddenness. There was a most horrifying spitting sound of anger, exactly like an irate opossum. The two kiwis exploded out of the burrow, crashed into one of the tripods, shot past my legs and vanished into the bush, swearing profusely! We presumed last year's chick had returned home, only to be driven away because of the arrival of the new baby.

The accompanying photograph (v. p. 77) does not show the bird in a very attractive position. The Kiwi has its hackles up, either from fear, which I doubt, or from annoyance, which I think far more likely, as these kiwis were remarkably unconcerned and would walk round our legs and between the tripods.

[We are grateful to Dr. Soper for this account of his observations on a pair of Stewart Island Kiwis, the first since those of Guthrie-Smith,

recounted in *Muttonbirds and Other Birds* pp. 84-98. The identification of the sex of nimble kiwis at the nest in the night is not easy. Robson, Turbott and Wightman (*Notornis* VI. 150-152) have shown that in the North Island, the incubation after the first few days is the task solely of the male; and Oliver (*N.Z. Birds* II. 50) remarks that 'the young chick always stays with the male parent.' Does the Stewart Island subspecies behave differently? Ed.]



## CLASSIFIED SUMMARISED NOTES

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| <p>Avis Acres, Mrs., Levin<br/>           I. G. Andrew, Palmerston North<br/>           L. Angus, Greymouth<br/>           M. L. Barlow, Mrs., Invercargill<br/>           B. D. Bell, Blenheim<br/>           M. S. Black, Rotorua<br/>           A. Blackburn, Gisborne<br/>           C. D. Blomfield, Rotorua<br/>           M. Breen, Okato<br/>           W. J. Broun, Wellington<br/>           C. R. Buckeridge, Aotea<br/>           P. C. Bull, Lower Hutt<br/>           C. N. Challies, Wellington<br/>           M. A. Chapman, Dunedin<br/>           P. Child, Geraldine<br/>           D. Crockett, Christchurch<br/>           O. Cullen, Mrs., Whangarei<br/>           M. P. Daniel, Waerenga<br/>           J. C. Davenport, Auckland<br/>           H. F. Drake, Runanga<br/>           B. A. Ellis, Dunedin<br/>           D. Galey, Atiamuri<br/>           J. Gardner, Miss, Dunedin<br/>           P. Gay, New Brighton<br/>           R. Gillett, Lumsden<br/>           A. J. Goodwin, Miss, Clevedon<br/>           A. G. Gorby, Wellsford<br/>           J. Haldane, Bainham<br/>           B. D. Heather, Auckland<br/>           A. J. Hodgkin, Moa Flat<br/>           M. Hodgkins, Tauranga<br/>           F. P. Hudson, Kaipara Flats<br/>           J. R. Jackson, Christchurch<br/>           King's College Bird Club, Otahuhu<br/>           F. C. Kinsky, Wellington<br/>           P. M. Lewis, Miss, Puketitiri<br/>           C. J. Lindsay, Wellington<br/>           N. Macdonald, Miss, Howick<br/>           G. K. McKenzie, Clevedon<br/>           H. M. McKenzie, Mrs., Clevedon</p> | <p>H. R. McKenzie, Clevedon<br/>           M. E. McKenzie, Mrs., Clevedon<br/>           C. W. McLatchie, Mrs., Oamaru<br/>           R. V. McClintock, Mrs., Tauranga<br/>           D. V. Merton, Wellington<br/>           R. H. Michie, Kaitaia<br/>           K. H. Miers, Wellington<br/>           G. J. Moon, Warkworth<br/>           Otago University Biological Society<br/>           C. F. Parsonson, Kawau I.<br/>           J. H. Penrycook, Mrs., Timaru<br/>           W. T. Popplewell, Dunedin<br/>           A. Prickett, Mrs., Birkenhead<br/>           J. Prickett, Birkenhead<br/>           W. W. Renouf, Clevedon<br/>           A. R. Ringer, Auckland<br/>           A. Roberts, Mrs., Rotorua<br/>           M. R. Roberts, Rotorua<br/>           J. W. St. Paul, Moumoukai<br/>           R. St. Paul, Minginui<br/>           O. Sansom, Mrs., Invercargill<br/>           H. L. Secker, Wellington<br/>           Rae Shanks, Miss, Tamaki<br/>           D. J. Shaw, Clevedon<br/>           T. Shout, Raetihi<br/>           R. B. Sibson, Auckland<br/>           R. P. Stoddart, Mrs., Clevedon<br/>           C. Tattersall, Rotorua<br/>           B. Todd, Leithfield<br/>           L. E. Walker, Mrs., Dunedin<br/>           A. Watson, Mt. Maunganui<br/>           J. Watt, Dunedin<br/>           K. Watts, New Brighton<br/>           J. C. Yaldwyn, Wellington<br/>           S. Chamberlin, Motuora I.<br/>           S. Chambers, Auckland<br/>           P. Morrison, Wellington<br/>           J. W. Bain, Gisborne<br/>           M. Fitzgerald, Gisborne</p> |
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[Photograph by Dr. M. F. Soper

- XI. STEWART ISLAND KIWI photographed by flashlight near entrance to nest-burrow. The bird's hackles are raised probably in annoyance.  
(v. p. 63).

## SPARROW'S FISHY END

On 30/7/58 a large kahawai was caught off the wharf at Orua Bay. When it was opened for cleaning, several crabs were found inside, and also a whole sparrow (*P. domesticus*) recently swallowed, feathers, claws and all.

S. C. RUTHERFURD



## SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR OF AN ALBINO STARLING

An albino Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) has been consistently seen at Tikokino, Hawkes Bay, since August, 1956, that is for two and a half years. It is without doubt the same bird, as I have seen no other albino among the many flocks of Starlings that visit the farm. The strange thing is that during all that time I have never known the bird to frequent more than three paddocks, in all an area of about 100 acres. During January and February, 1959, I could guarantee to see this bird by day at any time that I cared to look. Of course, it was impossible to say whether it was the flock numbering about a thousand birds that kept to these strict territorial limits or the bird itself which might have joined any flock that had been visiting the area. Unfortunately, I had not the time to spend on a lengthy watch on this bird, to study its movements at dawn and dusk or to find out where it roosted.

R. W. STEVENS



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**LETTER**

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Sir,

May I correct an error which I made inadvertently over the date when I photographed the Kiwi in Stewart Island? It was not in August but in September, 20-23 inclusive.

I would like also to make one comment on the sex of the bird in the burrow. If, as I understand, it is the male that has the high-pitched screaming call (the female's call being hoarser), then it was definitely the male that called from outside the burrow each night and the female which came out of the burrow and answered with the hoarser note.

M. F. SOPER

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