

FIELD STUDY WEEK-END, MARLBOROUGH 1958

A Field Study Week-end was held for the first time by the Ornithological Society over Labour Week-end, 25th-27th October, 1958. This was an experiment, run on behalf of the Society by the Blenheim members, and it was acclaimed a success. On the days prior to the week-end thirty-one members gathered, some from as far as North Auckland and South Otago. Most of the visitors were billeted by local members and members of the Marlborough Deerstalkers' Association. Seven local people took part in the field excursions.

On Friday evening members gathered at P. C. Macnab's home to learn the arrangements for the week-end. W. A. Hood showed slides of Sutherland and Charles Sounds to complete the evening and a light supper was served.

Saturday morning saw members gathering in town for an early start to Picton, where the launch left shortly after 8 a.m. for the outer Queen Charlotte Sound. The weather was not encouraging, with heavy cloud and rain, and further down the sound a strong wind whipped the sea into big waves. It was obvious that the White Rocks (King Shag colony) would have to be foregone; so the launch put in to Ship Cove for respite and the members had lunch. The turbulent wind made conditions ideal for the Fluttering Shearwaters, which were in large numbers. Several shags, penguins and other birds were seen and at Ship Cove the party was greeted by a pair of Black Oystercatchers.

After lunch the party put out again into the rough seas and sufficient shelter was found behind Motuara Island to enable several groups to be landed to examine parts of the island for petrel burrows. Much excitement resulted from the discovery of nesting Blue Penguins and Sooty Shearwaters and some of the observers' hands suffered considerably. From Motuara Island the launch steamed out by Kokomohua Island, where big seas were encountered and several oceanic species were noted — prions (*P. turtur?*), Salvin's Mollymawk — and also odd King Shags were seen. Shelter was again found behind Long Island and the party went ashore to visit the colony of Fluttering Shearwaters. Many were seen and also more nesting Blue Penguins.

From Long Island the launch returned to Picton, calling at a shag colony on Blumine Island, where Pied and White-throated Shags were well forward with breeding. All visitors returned to their billets tired and happy notwithstanding the adverse weather.

A later start was made on Sunday morning and all travelled to the Pilot Station at the Wairau Bar, where J. R. Eyles and his friends ferried us across the river to the Boulder Bank. Here the party visited the Moa Hunters' Camp and its discoverer, J. Eyles, told of the history and the finds made in the area. Small groups of Godwit and South Island Pied Oystercatchers were seen and large numbers of Black Swans. Banded Dotterel were breeding in good numbers on the Boulder Bank.

During lunch the writer spoke on the importance of field study particularly on the more common species, which are more readily

available, yet little is known of their habits. He also gave a summary of the birds recorded from the Wairau Lagoons. The return journey was made along the Wairau River via the Tuamarina Track. At the bridge across the Wairau River on the Nelson-Blenheim Highway about twenty Black-fronted Terns were seen feeding over the rapids and others were seen feeding over ploughed paddocks at Woodbourne.

In the evening the party had a feast of slides showing native and introduced birds, by J. Prickett and M. F. Soper, and Fair Isle, Scotland, by J. Kikkawa. The President, P. C. Bull, spoke briefly, thanking the local members and friends for their hospitality and again drew attention to the need of study on the more common species by individual and team effort.

Monday morning saw the party headed for Kaikoura and many introduced finches were seen en route. High winds made conditions difficult at the Kaikoura Peninsula, but half the party braved the wade through the channel to the Red-billed Gull Colony on the rockshelf, where hundreds of gulls were covering eggs. Here also at least 45 Turnstones were feeding. At the same time others observed Godwits, Oystercatchers and Stilts at another spot on the Peninsula. Several large seals could be seen resting on the rocks further offshore.

The party drove through to the Kowhai River, south of Kaikoura, to find sufficient shelter from the gale to have lunch. During lunch the group was visited by a Pied Fantail with three young, two of which were of the black phase. The writer spoke on the three permanent schemes of the Society (Ringing, Nest Records, Beach Patrol) and stressed the need for the co-operation of members, particularly as regards the keeping of nest records of common species. He also briefly covered the birds of the Kaikoura Lakes.

After lunch all returned to the Peninsula, where the main body moved around to the southern side to observe the huge concentration of c. 5000 nesting White-fronted Terns. Offshore Giant Petrels, Fluttering Shearwaters, Sooty and possibly Flesh-footed Shearwaters were numerous and at least two dark Arctic Skuas were seen. Two corpses of Hutton's Shearwater were collected at the Peninsula. One Golden Plover and a Reef Heron were also seen and numerous gulls and shags. The party returned to Blenheim and en route detoured via the Solar Salt Works at Lake Grassmere, where Caspian Terns and Red-billed Gulls were nesting on some small islets.

The evening was spent at P. C. MacNab's home with some 8m.m. movies shown by K. Rowe of Dotterel and other birds and slides of Little Barrier Island by L. Wintle until those leaving by the midnight ferry were taxed to Picton.

The week-end experiment had been very worthwhile and although many of the projects planned had to be abandoned owing to the inclement weather and the non-co-operation of the birds, all left with a much stimulated interest in bird study. The Society will no doubt benefit from their increased knowledge and desire to organise and conduct local bird study. The universal query on departure was, "Where will the next one be held?"

— BRIAN D. BELL