

CENSUS OF BROWN TEAL ON WAIPU RIVER SYSTEM

JULY 19-20, 1958

By BRIAN D. BELL

A census of Brown Teal (*A. chlorotis*) was carried out by an enthusiastic team of ornithologists from South Auckland, Auckland and Northland in co-operation with the writer on the week-end of July 19-20. The complete river system was covered from the town (Waipu) up for a distance of at least five miles radius. The weather for the week-end was favourable, except for two heavy hail or rain showers on the Saturday afternoon. However, as the week-end was preceded by heavy rain, this could have had some bearing on the numbers seen.

The Waipu River empties its waters into the sea 25 miles south of Whangarei and rises in the bush and scrub covered hills behind the Waipu District. In the town the river, which is tidal to this point, divides into four streams, which further inland split up more. These streams run through dairy-farming land and are well known as one of the remaining strongholds of the Brown Teal. Only the lowland from the town inland was covered by this census and no attempt was made to probe the upper reaches of the streams running back into the hinterland.

The vegetative cover along the banks varied considerably, and some parties were less fortunate than others in striking large areas of gorse along the creek banks. Some parts still retained a bush fringe (predominantly totara and kahikatea) while others had a choking growth of willow. There were sections of open stream where the pastures came right down to the creek, but even in these spots cover was available from *Mariscus* sedge, *Arum* lily, etc. In limited areas there were fringes of swamp and many of these were very wet as a result of the heavy rains. The streams themselves are not very wide, and except in the lower reaches would not be much greater than a half chain, but over the whole they are very deep except where choked with willow. The flow was on the whole steady but could not be classed as swift.

The party was split into pairs, and each pair was allotted a section of stream, which when considering the winding course would amount to about 8 to 10 miles. The pairs worked with one on each bank. A special effort was made to count all the teal and determine their sex. Enquiries were made from local people met on the way and an eye was kept on shooting signs. The number of Grey Duck was also recorded.

On the Saturday the Waionehu Stream (South River), Ahuroa River, Pohenui Stream (North River), Mill Brook and Finlayson Brook were covered by seven pairs. The census began at 10 a.m. and all parties were collected at 4 p.m. A preliminary survey was made on the Waihoihoi Stream by two pairs, but the figures are not included in the day's tally, as a more intensive survey was to be done on this the following day. 36 Brown Teal were seen during the day, including 13 drakes, 10 ducks and 13, sex not determined. Over the same area 146 Grey Duck were seen.

On the Sunday a concentrated effort was made on the Waihoihoi Stream by five parties between 10.30 a.m. and 1 p.m. Also two dams on the Government (Lands and Survey) Development Block east of the Waihoihoi and a lagoon on Mr. Ryan's property adjacent to the Waihoihoi were inspected. There was one pair of teal on the Lands and Survey dams and one drake on Ryan's lagoon. Grey Duck tallies for these two areas were 45 and 8 respectively. The number of teal seen on the Waihoihoi was 19 (7 drakes, 10 ducks, 2 undetermined) and the Grey Duck tally for this same area was 60. This gave the total number of Brown Teal seen on the Waipu System as 58, and Grey Duck as approximately 260, although it is likely that some of the Grey Duck were counted twice as they move about more.

For purposes of comparison, a summary of census results from earlier visits is given for the Waihoihoi Stream from the Waipu township to the Glenmohr Road Bridge. These were made by Messrs L. C. Bell and F. L. Newcombe of Internal Affairs Department. On these occasions an effort was made to work as stealthily as possible and this could prove a better method of seeing birds as they readily conceal themselves when approached. In each case the first figure given is for Brown Teal and the second for Grey Duck. 23/1/52, 65, 23; 8/9/53, 45, 28; 14/6/54, (Waipu to Simpkins Rd.), 52, 15; 4/4/56, 40, 36; 30/10/56, 52, c.40 adults and 40+ ducklings.

Summaries of each section in the 1958 census are as follows: Pohenui Stream (upper), 3, 15; Pohenui Stream (lower), 3, 18; Ahuroa River (upper), 11, 12; Ahuroa River (lower), 2, 24; Mill Brook, 1, c. 48; Finlayson Brook, 14, 15; Waionehu Stream, 2, 14; Lands and Survey Development Dams, 2, 45+; Ryan's Lagoon, 2, 8+; Waihoihoi Stream (Simpkins Rd. to Glenmohr Bridge), 0, 5; Waihoihoi Stream (MacFinlayson's to Waipu township), 7, 17; Waihoihoi Stream (MacFinlayson's up to meet Glenmohr Party), 5, 6; Waihoihoi Stream (Glenmohr Bridge down), 7, 32.

From the observations made it appears that the Brown Teal have developed a preference for a willow association on the stream, but what is more significant is the high populations noted wherever shooting was not allowed either by the owner or by regulations. Factors which could have influenced the number seen were the possibility that nesting had already started and some teal had shifted off the main streams and the high water level could have scattered the population. The greatest value of the census was that it established the presence of Brown Teal over the whole of the lower Waipu River System, whereas previously it was known only from the Waihoihoi Stream and suspected from the others. Also it was an excellent example of what can be achieved by an organized team of observers.

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