

## FOCUS ON NEW ZEALAND BIRDS

By G. J. H. MOON, A.R.P.S. — *Cameo Press, 1957*

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This is a book which all N.Z. bird-lovers will wish to have on their shelves beside the volumes of Guthrie-Smith, Stead, Buddle and Turbott. The author is an expert naturalist in the good old-fashioned sense. He watches and photographs birds for the fun of the thing — or the love of the game — and because they are a challenge to his skill.

By profession a vet., he has a wide clientele of farmer-friends, who quickly tell him of strange birds appear on their land and often find the nests which later he is able to photograph. Though most of the birds whose portraits appear in this book occur in the vicinity of Warkworth, the author has visited Little Barrier to obtain pictures of Red-fronted Parakeet and Whitehead; and the Firth of Thames and Manukau Harbour in search of waders.

The book contains many remarkable pictures. Especially noteworthy are series on Kingfisher, Morepork and Reef Heron which illustrate how superbly by using modern apparatus, the master craftsman may "stop" a Kingfisher's wings or overcome the darkness of the night and the gloom of a sea-cave. It goes without saying that when a vagrant Royal Spoonbill wintered near the author's home, it soon fell a victim to his hunting with the camera.

This book is much more, however, than a portrait gallery. The author has an eye for the significance of behaviour and feeding, and his notes contain many original observations. Pictures of the Silvereye show the young being fed on caterpillars, spiders and berries. Moreporks are shown bringing a variety of insects to the nest. The notes on the feeding of young Reef Herons are most informative. It is much to be hoped that the author will soon give us a second volume containing portraits of more birds, together with the intimate notes such as can be obtained only from a hide.

Geoff Moon, as Edgar Stead before him, has been unlucky in his publisher, whose workmanship, both in the reproduction of the plates and in the binding, falls far behind the technical excellence of the author.

— R.B.S.



## SHORT NOTES

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### SHOVELERS DIVING FOR FOOD

The Shovelers of New Zealand (*A. rhynhotis variegata*) belong naturally to the group of dabbling ducks, which seek their food from the surface or from the bottom in shallow water, without completely submerging; and to witness some of these diving for food in from four to six feet of water was a new experience. Most ducks can dive; but the dabblers do so usually, either in play during courtship, or to escape from danger. At best these dives are shallow and of brief duration. But off Hamurana on the north shore of Lake Rotorua I have with others watched Shovelers behaving like Scaup (*Aythya novaeseelandiae*).

In January, 1958, Mr. W. J. Broun and I were watching Black Swans (*C. atratus*) feeding well off shore. To reach bottom they had to employ the familiar "tip up" method, immersing neck and upper breast to do so. Among the swans were some half-dozen Shovelers diving, obviously for food, because with the aid of binoculars we could plainly see the action of swallowing, as the birds emerged from the dive. The swans appeared to be feeding on subaqueous vegetation and naturally we supposed that the ducks were also. The duration of submergence we calculated to be about ten seconds, although not timed by watch.

Again in May, 1958, in the same area Mr. H. R. McKenzie and I watched a similar performance. This time an isolated group of Shovelers were diving continuously, in what we estimated would be from six to eight feet of water. On this occasion I timed the dives, using the "sweep" or second hand of the watch, whilst my companion kept the telescope on the divers. The duration of seven recorded dives was: 7, 8, 8, 9, 9, 9, 10 seconds; an average of  $8\frac{1}{2}$  seconds.

M. S. BLACK



## FEEDING HABITS OF THE BLACK-BILLED GULL

### *Introduction:*

This investigation was carried out in Southland between 15th October and 10th December, 1957, by a Technical Field Officer of the Marine Department. The Technical Field Service, to which the Officer belongs, undertakes investigations in freshwater fisheries and is sponsored by the Council of South Island Acclimatisation Societies. This study, which was requested by the Southland Acclimatisation Society, was made to find out whether Black-billed Gulls eat trout during the breeding season.

### *Findings:*

#### (a) Nesting Habits

During the summer months the Black-billed Gull nests in large numbers in certain river beds. The birds nest in colonies of about 50-100, or in colonies up to several thousand birds. The nesting sites are usually on an island or on high shingle bars away from floods. Five colonies were found on the Aparima River between Wrey's bush and the Jacob River bridge, and two on the Oreti River between Rocky Point and the railroad bridge near Lumsden.

Two colonies on the Aparima River were selected for detailed study. The small colony, (A) on a shingle bar, consisted of about 500 nests, each of which contained up to three eggs. The larger colony (B), situated on a well consolidated shingle island, covered about 10,000 sq. yards and contained about 3000 nests.

On 22nd October, fourteen chicks were seen at colony A and none at B, and by 8th November the numbers of chicks had increased to 81 at A and 47 at B. After this date the number of chicks increased rapidly, but a severe flood in the Aparima completely destroyed colony A on 18th November, 1957. No re-nesting attempts were seen at the site of this colony. 200 chicks were killed by the same flood at colony B. When observations ceased on 22nd November, 750 chicks were counted