

NOTORNIS

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AUSTRALIAN COOTS NESTING IN OTAGO

By M. M. SMALL and M. F. SOPER

One of us (M.M.S.) first noticed two pairs of these Coots (*Fulica atra australis*) in the Arrowtown district on 12/10/'58. They were very confiding, allowing us to get a good look at them on numerous occasions, so that there was no doubt about identification. The birds were somewhat larger than a Black Teal, blue black in colour and the cream frontal shield made them unmistakable. Most of their time was spent swimming and diving in typical coot manner in deep water. We heard a variety of calls; the two commonest being a harsh "crark" and a noise very similar to someone chopping with an axe.

About the end of October it became obvious that both pairs were holding territories. We watched this for a while to make sure; then erected a hide in a suitable patch of open water. After a day in the hide the conclusion was reached that they were nesting, but that a boat was going to be needed. On 21/11/'58, using a boat, we saw one pair with two chicks (and almost certainly more but they were being hunted by a Harrier and were taking cover, so the full brood was not ascertained). The other pair had a nest with five eggs. Two "false nests" were found, empty; each at the base of a willow growing out of four feet of water. The nests were made of willow rootlets lined with dead raupo leaves and placed from 4 to 6 inches above the water line. The nest with eggs was similarly placed on a solid foundation deep in the tangle of willow, surrounded by chest-high water, composed of willow rootlets and lined with dead raupo leaves. The five eggs were creamy white, evenly and sparsely spotted with small and medium-sized black spots.

[For some years it has been suspected that a few Australian Coots were breeding in the south of New Zealand. This factual account of nesting is therefore all the more satisfying.—Ed.]



THE LAST (?) OCCURRENCE OF NOTORNIS IN THE NORTH ISLAND

By W. J. PHILLIPPS

The following is submitted as an important and apparently factual occurrence of a strange bird taken in the Ruahines last century. The evidence pre-supposes that the Maoris who identified the bird as the Mohoau had seen similar birds before and were able to make a correct decision, perhaps a remote contingency. But, nevertheless, it seems desirable to place the matter on record in the hope that it will eventually assist in further investigation. Our informant states that the bird had blue feathers and resembled a Pukeko.