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FURTHER NOTES ON WELCOME SWALLOWS IN NORTHLAND

By ROSS H. MICHIE

Following my report (*Notornis* VIII, 61-62) on the nesting of two pairs of Welcome Swallows (*H. neoxena*) near Awanui during the spring of 1958, I made further notes on these two pairs and learnt that Welcome Swallows had been seen in other localities.

An untimely fate befell the brood of three which left the nest under the Awanui bridge about November 10th. These young birds often used to sit on the wires at the edge of the bridge till an irresponsible youth found nothing better to do than to shoot them with an air-rifle. However, the parent birds got busy again and laid eggs in the old nest. By this time most people in the district knew of the existence of the nest; and before the incubation period was reached, someone removed it. When I visited the bridge a day or two later the birds were flying about but seemed distressed. They made no further attempt to rebuild, although they remained for several days in the vicinity.

The pair at L. Ngatu rebuilt and laid three eggs. Although the children from the Paparore school bathed at the spot daily, they did not molest them and everything was going well till the school broke up for the Christmas holidays. Then this nest suffered the same fate as the one at Awanui. I made several visits to the spot later, but there was no sign of any further breeding activity by the swallows.

As a result of publicity in the press, Mr. H. McPherson, who has a timber mill at Kaingaroa, five miles east of Awanui, sent me another report. During the summer when he was getting pine logs from a plantation at Aurere, some three miles further east from Kaingaroa, he observed a pair of Welcome Swallows nesting under a concrete bridge over a tidal stream on the Aurere flat. Fortunately the nest was situated over the water and escaped interference. One observer later reported that he had seen seven swallows sitting on a telegraph wire near here during a rainy period; so it is reasonable to suppose that this pair raised one brood of five or two smaller broods.

It is satisfactory to be able to report that the Welcome Swallows which are evidently attempting to establish themselves in Northland were not wiped out or blown away by the cyclone which struck Northern New Zealand in March. In early May two friends observed swallows skimming over the water and catching insects over what remains of L. Tangonge near Kaitaia. A single bird was noticed by Mr. H. Kirtlan, and two days later three were seen by Mr. N. Matthews.

From another locality Welcome Swallows were reported by Mr. A. Stewart of Kaitaia, who had accompanied me on one occasion to watch the Awanui nest. Subsequently, while he was travelling by car to Auckland, he stopped for a few minutes at Waimeo, about three

miles south of Kawakawa*, and to his surprise saw a pair of Welcome Swallows flying about in pursuit of insects. In April I took a hurried run to Auckland and on the way stopped at the big concrete bridge over the Waimeo stream, half expecting to find some evidence that Welcome Swallows had nested there. But though the situation was ideal, I was disappointed.

It appears that during the summer of 1958-1959 there was a fair sprinkling of Welcome Swallows in Northland. Breeding is known to have taken place in three localities and possibly in a fourth. One pair is known to have succeeded. Another pair was robbed of success when all seemed well and its young were already on the wing. The evidence indicates that but for human interference the Welcome Swallow would now be firmly established as a breeding bird in Northland. In Australia some populations of Welcome Swallows are resident and non-migratory; and the winter-climate of northern New Zealand should not prove too severe for this useful insect-catching bird, which could become a charming addition to our small list of breeding passerines.

*[Two Welcome Swallows were seen here again on 10/8/59 by Mr. A. Blackburn. They flew across the main road.—Ed.]



NESTING HABITATS ON THE SHOTOVER RIVERBED

By M. F. SOPER

A casual glance at a South Island riverbed rather gives the impression of "just a lot of shingle"; but it is surprising, when one starts to look at it through the eyes of a nesting bird, how many variations there are in surface, contour, texture and shelter. The Shotover River is typical of many South Island rivers in that it runs through alternate gorges and shingle flats, the final flat differing only in being smaller than most (3 miles by $\frac{1}{2}$ mile). This river flat has the usual elements; large stones (2ft. across) through shingle and gravel to fine sand; areas covered with short, coarse grasses and lichens; patches of willows, of gorse and broom; but 90% of it is shingle and it is in these areas that the four common river-bed birds nest: Banded Dotterel, S.I. Pied Oystercatcher, Black-billed Gull and Black-fronted Tern. This expanse of shingle is not all of the same consistency. As a result of the "throw" of the river as it swings from one side of the river bed to the other the shingle tends to get sorted into areas of different sizes — banks of big stones, flat areas of sand, areas of round stones, areas of flat stones, areas of continual change and areas that stay much the same year after year. Each bird has its own niche in this variable shingly expanse.

When a Banded Dotterel makes its nest it first hollows out a hemispherical cup rather like half a tennis ball let into the ground. I have been lucky enough to find a nest at this stage, when it is a very neat and accurate piece of work. To do this the consistency of the river