

206 and 231, whilst as an instance of greater numbers, 940 Red-billed Gulls feeding in a paddock have been counted in this way.

It will be seen that the only possibility of error in this method is when one bird is directly behind another, and so is obscured from the camera, but in practice this is a small margin which would have the effect of slightly increasing the numbers.

It is not, of course, essential to use expensive colour film for this work, and black and white negatives will reduce the cost to about 2½d. for a count exposure, printing being unnecessary. At this price one can afford to make complete records, and the fact that light and shade are transposed when the negative is projected does not affect its efficiency for this purpose. A further advantage of black and white is the much higher shutter speed which can be used, resulting in sharper definition for moving subjects. Since these are usually far enough away for the focus to be set at infinity, one can employ large stops and speeds of 1/125th to 1/300th second. The former gives quite satisfactory results.

I have found this technique both simple and effective. It can naturally be used for counts of nests in thickly populated breeding colonies as well. The actual counting is tedious, but at least it can be carried out in the comfort of one's home, and there is the consolation of knowing that the tally is virtually correct.

W. T. PARHAM



#### ERYTHRISTIC STILTS IN MANUKAU

During the autumn of 1957 aberrant erythristic Stilts (*H. leucocephalus*) were found in two localities a few miles apart in upper Manukau and it appears that the sightings were of two distinct birds.

On 10/1/57 when Mr. A. C. Hipwell and I paid a visit to Harania Creek, many Pied Stilts were feeding in the tidal shallows of what, because it runs below a dump of old iron near the Otahuhu railway workshops, local bird-watchers call Scrap-iron Creek. One of the stilts attracted our notice because of its unusual colouring. Its crown was not clear white but brownish or a pale creamy orange; face, throat and breast were of a rich, rusty red, but the lower belly and undertail coverts were almost the normal white. The areas normally black were black.

At first we wondered if the reddish marks were the result of some sort of iron staining such as may sometimes be seen on the heads and necks of Mute Swans (*C. olor*), when they have been feeding in dirty water. But for a number of reasons this proposition seemed to us untenable. The water in which the Stilts were feeding was tidal and despite the proximity of heaps of rusty iron on the bank above, there were no stagnant pools of rusty water. No other Stilts in the vicinity were stained, but all were typically immaculate and the underparts of the reddish bird were almost white. Lastly, Stilts do not normally feed by dipping the head under the water. We concluded, therefore, that the bird we were watching was a genuine colour sport, an interesting example of erythrism. There is no mention by Buller or Oliver of any such colour variety in Stilts. Some weeks later on 20/2/57, T. G. Ledgard saw this 'reddish' Stilt again in the same creek. From notes made on the spot, A.C.H. subsequently made a charming colour-sketch of this unusual bird.

On 18/4/57 about 400 Pied Stilts with other waders had gathered at full-tide on the dry mud bottom of the explosion crater below Mangere Mountain. On the edge of them was a partially erythristic stilt quite differently marked from the earlier specimen. It had the gray smudgy markings on the head which are typical of many young Stilts in their first autumn. The reddishness began on the lower neck and was darkest on the belly where it seemed to be about the same shade as the lower band of a male Banded Dotterel (*C. bicinctus*), a rich, deep chestnut. This bird was not seen to be molested by the other Pied Stilts, but it stood apart near the edge of the flock where it was most conspicuous.

If it is permissible to speculate on the occurrence of stilts with reddish markings, one interesting thought which arises is whether there may be a latent tendency towards the development of red feathering in the non-black areas of the tall black-and-white waders. In Australia the Banded Stilt (*Cladorhynchus leucocephalus*) has a broad, reddish chest band and the Red-necked Avocet (*Recurvirostra novaehollandiae*), which seems to have attempted to establish itself in New Zealand in the nineteenth century, has a chestnut-coloured head and neck, while in the American Avocet (*R. americana*) these parts are pale rufous or cinnamon.

R. B. SIBSON



#### KOKAKO IN LAWSON'S CYPRESSES

Waitekauri, an old mining settlement in the Colville Range, ends in half a mile of rough track two miles beyond Golden Cross. Where the heavy bush begins, there is a derelict farm-house with a row of *Cupressus lawsoniana* on the upper side of the track. On 6/6/59 Mr. A. Blackburn and I first heard clicking and sucking notes above us in the cypresses and then a tui-like whistle. After considerable movement of the foliage a single Kokako (*Callaeas cinerea wilsoni*) planed from the trees to the deep gully. No details of plumage could be noted.

On the following day we had better luck when just before noon two Kokako made their way from the gully and remained in close view for about five minutes. Both birds flew across the track, a distance of about thirty feet, with a heavy laboured flight. The first made a very bad landing in a makomako, the second landed more neatly. While under observation the Kokako were seen to feed on the leaves of tawhero, mahoe and possibly kotukutuku. On both days the weather was dull and overcast with intermittent rain and cold winds.

N. HAMERTON



#### KOKAKO REPORTED FROM WILKIN VALLEY, LAKE WANAKA

On 15/2/58, while I was tramping with two companions down the Wilkin Valley at the head of L. Wanaka, I saw a bird with a dark blue, glossy body colour and a patch of orange below the eye. The bird was on the ground. As we approached, it first fluttered onto a dead trunk about four feet high, and then flew clumsily up the valley at a height of only six feet or so above the ground. The flight was very poor and we thought at first the bird must have been a fledgling.

This incident occurred in the first patch of bush, which was mixed