

SHORT NOTES

MORE NOTES ON THE NESTING OF WELCOME SWALLOWS IN NORTHLAND

On 16/11/59, Roger Simpson and I saw three Welcome Swallows flying over flat open land at Te Iringa about three miles south of Kaikohe. We particularly noticed their forked tails. A week later we saw two pairs and found two nests under a little concrete bridge near the school. The nests were built of mixed mud and straw and were about eighteen inches apart and five to six feet above the water. One nest was slightly larger than the other. There were pink droppings stuck on the concrete round the nests. This time we noticed the wide red band across the chests of the Welcome Swallows.

When I visited Te Iringa again on 1/2/60, two pairs of Welcome Swallows were still about, but only the larger nest remained and it held four chicks which, according to Roger Simpson, had hatched about 16/1/60. The young birds were reported flying on Feb. 5th and I saw the family party of six on Feb. 6th. On my next visit to Te Iringa on 12/2/60, one pair with three young ones (one young bird had evidently died or strayed) kept near the bridge, and a second pair were flying further afield.

On the way to Te Iringa I had called on Mr. Barrett of Old Bay Road, Ohaeawai, who had told me that last year (1959) he had noticed two or three Welcome Swallows near his house, but in February, 1960, he had seen seven. Ohaeawai is seven miles N.E. of Kaikohe, so it is likely that another pair bred there.

On 19/2/60 Roger Simpson reported that he had seen a flock of eleven Welcome Swallows, four adults and seven youngsters. We decided that the second pair, after abandoning their first nest, must have built another in the vicinity, possibly under another concrete bridge which we were unable to visit. On 25/2/60 Roger Simpson told me that one pair had laid another egg in their old nest; on 25/3/60 the pair were still tending their one egg which was obviously addled. I sent it to the Auckland War Memorial Museum.

It is interesting that Welcome Swallows stayed at Te Iringa during the winter. On 13/7/60 I saw four there, and one pair were using the old nest for roosting. So far as we know no one else in the Te Iringa district knew about the nests and they were not disturbed.

— MALCOLM ROSS

The children of Waiomio Maori School, south of Kawakawa, first noticed Welcome Swallows in the district in 1958. Two nests were known, one under each bridge; but no young were seen.

When I came to this school as head-teacher in 1959, I was rather surprised when the children told me about seeing swallows in the spring. However, there were several pairs and they stayed in the district throughout the winter of 1959. Nests had been built on two concrete bridges and also in a shed near one of the bridges. The first nests were broken in spite of the vigilance of the children who lived nearby; but the swallows built again and two broods were hatched under Cherrington's bridge. One nest held five chicks. The other was too high to investigate.

During the recent (1960) winter, Welcome Swallows stayed in the district again; and as there are considerably more than last year, other clutches must have been reared successfully somewhere. On one occasion seventeen were counted sitting on power-lines.

So far this spring four nests have been built on the two concrete bridges. One pair had already reared a clutch of three chicks by October 18; and another pair had five eggs. The Cherrington children, who live near one of the bridges and who watch the nests closely, tell me that the swallows seem to lay one egg every other day and that the chicks appear about three weeks after the laying of the first egg. The nests are built with a mixture of mud and dry grass. To build, the swallows stick a big piece of mud to the wall and leave it to harden. Then they add soft mud and use their feet to press dry grass into it. They continue doing this till they have built the solid part of the nest. The inside is lined with feathers. The local swallows seem to prefer pheasant feathers, if they can find them.

Some of the children reported that the swallows were flying up to a cowshed to feed on skim-milk curds. But what I think they are doing is catching the little insects which are found on the curd and which are disturbed when the curd is scattered.

Through the watchfulness of the children, it seems that there will be every chance that the colony of Welcome Swallows at Waioomio will again increase this year.

— C. E. SHANKS



OLD AND RECENT NESTING RECORDS OF PETRELS IN TARANAKI

An early reference to muttonbirds breeding inland is to be found under the date 5/12/1846 in the diary of Richard Taylor. He was making a cross-country trip from the Patea to the middle Wanganui, and after crossing the Makaau Stream, which appears on modern maps as Makahu ("h" was silent in the Wanganui dialect) he came to a pa Mangaehu in the Matemateonga Range. The portion of the day's diary entry reads: "The pa is close to a beautiful clear stream in which I took a bathe. Opposite the pa is a small island in the river on which stands the remains of a pa. It is connected with the mainland by a pole which is tied to two trees which incline partly over the river. In the evening there was quite a deafening noise from vast numbers of birds flying about; I found on enquiry it was the *titi* which is remarkable as being both a sea-bird and a night-bird as well. The natives take large numbers of them by lighting a fire on top of some lofty precipice. The birds, they say, mistake it for the crest of a wave and alight close to it when they are knocked down with sticks. They are spoken of as being very fat and delicious eating."

Taylor kept a day-to-day diary on his travels, and in spite of the loss of old place-names, the positions of his camps can generally be determined within a few miles by topography, distance travelled, and such names as have survived. Mangaehu is on the fringe of settlement and from here to the headwaters of the Waitotara River there is still a large, nearly virgin, forest which might be a suitable area for searching for inland-breeding muttonbirds.

— A. D. MEAD