

throat was clearly observed throughout at twenty-seven feet. The cock, a fine bird in good colour, was not present at the time.

B. W. Tucker (The Handbook of British Birds) states: "Imperfect song occasionally from female." That this bird was a female can hardly be doubted. It was as pale as a Chaffinch is ever seen; whereas in August even a young male would show some darker shading or definite colour. Besides the male bird the only other Chaffinch seen about at that time was an undersized female, which could have been a chick of the previous season. The garden pair later built a nest near the house, but deserted after two eggs had been laid.

— (Mrs.) H. M. MCKENZIE



ARE RIFLEMEN POLYGAMOUS?

During November and December of 1959 and 1960 I found seventeen nests of the South Island Rifleman (*Acanthisitta c. chloris*). Of these nine were 10ft. or more from the ground and were not followed further; and two others were not studied through lack of time or opportunity. Thus there were six nests which were observed from a photographic hide, set at 3½ft. from the nest, for periods ranging from four to eight hours each.

Of these six nests, four had more than the expected complement of two birds in attendance, viz.

Nest No. 2: 1 male and 2 females	No. 13: 2 males and 2 females,
No. 9: 2 males and 1 female	one male and one female
No. 10: 1 male and 2 females	showing juvenile markings.

(v. Plate XXIX) At all four nests the essential criteria of having three (or four) birds at the nest at the same time, all carrying food and all being seen to enter the nest, were fulfilled.

While this is a small series, an incidence of four cases of polygamy (if polygamy is the word to use without too much being assumed) out of the six nests which were watched closely, seems to me a sufficiently high proportion to warrant the assumption that this behaviour is not just abnormal. Since Riflemen are quite strongly territorial, the occurrence of two males to a single female was therefore doubly surprising.

The occurrence of the two birds with juvenile markings I do not attempt to explain. The possibilities, though, provide interesting speculation. (a) That unoccupied birds on discovering a nest take a hand in feeding the young. There is something 'odd' which goes on with Yellowheads (*M. ochrocephala*) which could possibly be explained along these lines. I believe, too, that Guthrie-Smith entertained similar suspicions of Whitehead (*M. albicilla*) and Southern Skua (*Catharacta lonnbergi*) (v. Bird Life on Island and Shore 73-79 and 182-192). In my opinion the Rifleman is too strongly territorial to tolerate this.

(b) That they were part of an earlier brood helping with the nest. If this was so then they were doing something which I have not seen recorded about any other bird.

If neither of these suggestions is acceptable, then we are back to polygamous nesting, which by definition implies sexual maturity. The differences between adult and immature Riflemen are very marked, particularly the streaky spotting on the under surface, which leaves no



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XXIX — Rifleman (*A. chloris*) female with juvenile markings taking food to the nest. This nest was attended not only by two adults (m. & f.), which did most of the feeding of the still-downy chicks, but also by two juveniles (m. & f.), which brought food to the nest approximately half-hourly.

possibility of error for the photographer in a hide. These events were duly recorded on 35 m.m. Kodachrome. Questions which remain are:—

(a) How long do young Riflemen retain immature plumage? Could, for example, a late nestling of last season still be in juvenile plumage in November? (b) Is it possible for a Rifleman in what appears to be obviously immature plumage to be sexually mature?

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FAIRY PRION CHICK ATTACKED BY TUATARA

On the night of 25/12/60, as I was walking down the footpath below the lighthouse on The Brothers, I heard a petrel chick crying. I had a torch with me and I soon noticed the tail of a Tuatara protruding from the burrow from which the sound was coming. The tail disappeared and shortly the Tuatara came out of the burrow with the small chick of a Fairy Prion (*P. turtur*) in its mouth. The chick was held by the tail and was crying loudly. The Tuatara stopped and watched me for a short while before making a dash for the taupata scrub about a yard away. As it reached the scrub I seized the Tuatara by the tail and pulled it out. It still held on to the chick until I squeezed it by the neck.

On examining the Prion nestling, I found its rear quarter was badly torn with most of the down missing. I called Mr. Staley and Mr. Clearly and explained what had happened. Then as we knew the burrow from which the chick had come we returned it, though its chances of survival were small.

At various times I have found around this lighthouse station a number of dead chicks with heads missing and parts of the body eaten.

A. WRIGHT

(It has often been suspected that Tuataras may maim and partly devour small petrel chicks (cf. Notornis VIII, 135). This seems to be the first eye-witness account of an actual assault.—Ed.)

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MOREPORKS IN A NESTING BOX

Moreporks (*Ninox novae-seelandiae*) were known as regular nocturnal visitors to the grounds of King's College, Middlemore; and on one occasion one was seen roosting by day in the gloomy heart of a large holm-oak. As there were no hollow trees in the vicinity where a Morepork might nest, a nesting box, measuring 15in. x 10in. x 9in., with hole of 3in. diameter, was hopefully put up in this tree in 1958. Starlings, Mynas, Opossums showed some interest, but it appears that the box was finally occupied by rats.

In 1959 the holm-oak had to be felled, so the nesting box was transferred to one of a row of *Cupressus macrocarpa*, some 300 yards away and re-erected at about 40ft. The same year the box was used by a pair of Starlings; and Starlings again appeared to have reclaimed it late in September, 1960. But on 2/10/60 both Starlings were high in the tree screaming abuse in the direction of the box, in the entrance of which a Morepork was visible. During the ensuing weeks a Morepork was usually in or near the box.

The first egg was laid on 20/10/60 and a second probably on the