

FIELD STUDY WEEK-END, SOUTH AUCKLAND 1961

Fortunate indeed were those members of the Society who took part in the Labour Day week-end field studies and meetings based on Clevedon; for the weather was good, and the birds were most co-operative. Thirty-five members took part, mostly for the full course, some for one or two of the days. They came from Christchurch, Wellington, Wanganui, New Plymouth, Whakatane, Tauranga, Taupo, Cambridge, Hamilton, South Auckland, and Titoki and Rawene in Northland. Emphasis throughout was on bird study.

Members who had arrived on Friday evening, 20th October, met at the H. R. McKenzie's, where all meetings were held in their "big room." Mr. McKenzie gave an outline of what it was proposed to do, and the programme was discussed. Miss A. J. Goodwin projected slides of wading birds photographed by D. A. Urquhart, and some by W. T. Parham taken at the Labour Day Week-end at Whakatane, principally of excursions to Ohiwa Harbour. Finally she showed an interesting selection of scenes from her voyage by yawl-rigged yacht from England to N.Z.

On Saturday morning, seven carloads travelled to the Moumoukai bush for study of the Kokako. The party was met and guided by Mr. J. St. Paul, who has a long experience of this rare bird. Imagine a party of 36, young and old, seated in the bush on the crown of a hill overlooking a deep valley, for an hour of silent waiting, with attention concentrated on a miro tree known to be a favoured haunt of the Kokako. Meanwhile, the calls of Warblers, Shining Cuckoo, Fantail, Tui, and Kingfisher were heard. At last, a large dark bird was seen in the lower branches of the miro, then ascending by long hops in a zig-zag to the top, and disappearing behind a clump of kie-kie. Two short notes of song were heard, and after a time, movement away from the far side of the tree was noted. Later the Kokako returned and, as quietly, went away.

At the evening meeting, Mr. R. B. Sibson gave a talk on bird life of the eastern offshore islands of the Auckland Province, showing many of his own slides and a selection sent by Mr. R. H. Blanshard, of Little Barrier Island. Much was learnt of this island, the Poor Knights, Hen and Chickens, Mercury Group, the Aldermen and Mayor Island.

Through the good offices of a local member, Mr. G. McKenzie, Commodore of the Clevedon Cruising Club, the party was next day taken out on four large private launches and a smaller boat. Mr. McKenzie's own launch was "up," but he came on the trip. He and the other boat-owners did everything for the comfort and pleasure of all.

In the Wairoa (Clevedon) River, Pied and Black Shags were closely seen, Gannets patrolled both river and sea. About the river mouth where the falling tide was exposing the flats, were South Island Pied Oystercatchers, Blue and White-faced Herons, Godwits, Pied Stilts, Little Shags, Gulls, Caspian Terns, and a N.Z. Dotterel. The weather being perfect, it was decided to lunch on Tarakihi Island (Shag Rock).

The passengers were put ashore by dinghy, and most of the party scrambled up a track to find occupied burrows of Grey-faced Petrel and Blue Penguin. The corpse of a White-faced Storm Petrel was found, and a young Grey-faced Petrel seen. Land-birds noted on this isolated stack were Riro, Silvereye, Dunnock, Chaffinch, Starling and Blue Heron. A few of the party went to examine a Spotted Shag colony on the east side, where nesting was at various stages.

After a conference with boat-owners, it was decided to go on to Horu Horu (Gannet Rock), north-east of Waiheke Island. On the way there and back, Blue Penguins were observed, and on the wing were many Fluttering Shearwater and a few each of Buller's Shearwater and Flesh-footed Shearwater and one Arctic Skua, as well as some Spotted Shags and White-fronted Terns. The sea was so calm that all who wished landed on Horu Horu and spent some time photographing and studying the Gannets. There were sitting birds, eggs, small black leathery-looking chicks, up to half-grown ones in fluffy white down, and adults "necking," landing or leaving.

That night, a party of enthusiasts camped in the Moumoukai bush with the object of hearing the dawn song of the Kokako. Two came to the miro tree and much of their repertoire was heard, including a descending semitone with repeated coos, and an ascending fourth, whistled; then soft tapping notes. One watcher in another part of the bush heard the pipe-organ notes.

On Monday a profitable few hours were spent observing waders at their high-tide roost at the Karaka shell-bank. The number of birds seen was estimated at about 10,000, the bulk of which were Godwits; but especially appreciated were a noisy gathering of about 230 Turnstones; six Red-necked Stints and summering flocks of Wrybills (48) and S.I. Pied Oystercatchers (c. 600). Two pairs of Red-breasted Dotterels had nests, each with two eggs; and two pairs of Banded Dotterels were agitated over full clutches of three.

In the saltmarsh scrub several Fernbirds were seen and heard. Even for those less energetic members who were content to sit still on the bank, the long skeins of Godwits and the dense clouds of mixed shore-birds were an exciting sight. Don Urquhart's "hide," from which several photographers have taken many fine photographs, was examined with interest.

That evening, Miss M. C. McIntyre kindly came back from Howick and entertained those remaining with slides of the Whakatane Field-study Week-end, Monarch Butterflies, beautiful flowers and South Island scenery. Mr. McMillan (Rawene), on behalf of all the party, thanked the hosts and especially Mrs. McKenzie for making the stay at Clevedon so enjoyable. Those of the members without cars are much indebted to car owners for transport on this and other occasions.

— R. V. McL.