

On April 5, a visit was made to the flats at the mouth of the Piako River. Stilts, Godwits, Knots and a few Wrybills were crowded together on the narrow strip of mud left between the tide line and the salicornia. The stilts and wrybills were very passive, but the restive Godwits and Knots quickly took wing and flew about. Clear above the chatter of the Godwits came the rippling call of a Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus* ? *varegatus*). The call was repeated several times and it is possible that more than one bird was present. I had one good view of a Whimbrel in flight with some Godwits, and had the impression that it was a little larger in the body than they. The decurved beak, of about the size of the beak of a female Godwit, was very distinct. There are few, if any, records of Whimbrel for the mainland of the North Island.

A Curlew (*Numenius cyanopus*) was seen on three successive days—on April 4 and 6, just south of Miranda; on April 5, at the mouth of the Piako. There should be no mistaking this large curlew. We first heard its call, a slow, deliberate “ker-woik,” and as it flew leisurely past us, its massive decurved beak, hardly less than 7in. in length, put identification beyond doubt. In flight with Godwits it appeared twice their size. It was a restless bird, flying up and down the shore when the tide was full, and sometimes disappearing out over the waters of the Firth, only to return again shortly. It would temporarily join any passing flock of waders, Godwits, Knots or Stilts, but would quickly leave them and go off alone, uttering its melancholy call.

#### SOME OBSERVATIONS ON BLACK-BILLED GULLS (*Larus Bulleri*) by R. B. Sibson.

The Rotorua lakes or some of them have long been known as the only breeding place of *Larus Bulleri* in the North Island. The following observations show that:

- (a) There may be an odd pair nesting away from the volcanic plateau;
- (b) There is a definite migration from some undetermined locality to the coast—certainly of the Firth of Thames and perhaps of the Bay of Plenty.

BAY OF PLENTY.—On September 8, 1940, W. Ridland and I saw a pair at the mouth of the Rangitaiki River. They showed territorial

#### 8.

aggressiveness and tried to keep the sand spit which they were occupying, clear of Red Billed Gulls. Shortly afterwards another pair was seen at the mouth of the Tarawera River, and on the next day, a pair was noted at Matata Lagoon. These places are not far from the headquarters of *Larus Bulleri* on the volcanic plateau. It seems possible to explain the presence of these gulls in these places in one or two ways, either:—

- (a) They were outlying breeding pairs extending the range from the Rotorua colony, or
- (b) They were birds which had wintered on the coast and had not yet returned to their breeding grounds.

FIRTH OF THAMES.—Considerable numbers winter here. They were first noticed on August 3, 1941, when between 250 and 300 were present, the tide being full, at the mouth of the Miranda Creek. All observations since have been made at the mouth of this creek near full tide. When the tide is out it is difficult to see any at all, as they evidently feed out over the main waters of the firth. As spring advanced their numbers steadily declined. With the approach of winter, Black Billed Gulls have reappeared in the same place. The following counts have been made:—

1941: Aug. 3, 250–300; Oct. 12, 160; Oct. 27, c. 50; Nov. 9, 10 plus; Nov. 30, 15; Dec. 31, nil.

1942: Jan. 12, nil; Feb. 8, nil; March 8, nil; April 4, 14; April 6, c. 100.

The sudden increase between April 4 and April 6 is probably explained by the arrival of birds from their breeding grounds, coinciding by good luck with a time when they were under observation.

It is interesting to speculate upon the origin of these Black Billed Gulls in the Firth of Thames. It seems probable that they came from Rotorua. If this is so the Rotorua population must run into several hundreds. On September 9 and 10, I counted about 200 Black Billed Gulls in the evening on the rocks behind the Ward Baths, and by day a few birds had been seen at Hamurana Springs and Okere Inlet, and two pairs at Rotomahana. Yet, on October 12, 160 or more were still present at Miranda. Confirmation of a movement away from Rotorua comes from Mr. C. A. Fleming who was at Rotorua in mid-April, 1941. He says that of 135 gulls counted, only 8 were Black Billed. In all, there were 400 or more gulls but no higher percentages of Black Billed were noted.

I have been told that there is a small and rather inaccessible lake on Tongariro where "small" gulls nest. These might well be *Larus Bulleri*, and if so, they might be expected to winter in the Firth of Thames or the Bay of Plenty.

Lastly, in view of the fact that the Firth of Thames is a favourite wintering place for many South Island birds, e.g., Wrybills, Oystercatcher and probably Stilts, the possibility must not be ruled out, that some of the South Island Black Billed Gulls also find their way there.

## 9.

### NOTE ON BIRDS OF THE TAUPO DISTRICT. By K. A. Wodzicki.

The undersigned spent in the beginning of March 5–12 March, 1942 some time at Full James Fishing Camp; it is situated on the south bank of the Waikato River, within 10 miles of Taupo on the edge of the Kaingorea Plains. [Kaingaroa Plains.]

This country consists mainly of a scrub manuka forest, on poor volcanic soil, the left bank of the river chiefly being covered with large afforested areas of introduced pine trees. Another area some distance from Full James is also covered in this afforestation, and together these two afforested areas amount to several thousands of acres.

The Waikato River still retains at this point the character of a powerful mountainous stream, with many picturesque rapids. Further down, about 20–25 miles from Taupo this river comes into a flat type of country, slows its current and forming large belts has more suitable swampy conditions for many water and wader birds. Finally, 7 miles south of Taupo there are the famous Rotokaua Sulphur Fields with the Rotokaua Lake.

The bird life in this district is largely connected with these various biotops forming thus in an area of a few miles distance very different ecological conditions. Our outings covered a radius of about 10 miles along the Waikato River or to the south, and also in other directions. The following is a list of birds observed in the above-mentioned various areas of that territory:—

#### A.—MANUKA AND AFFORESTED AREAS.

1. CALIFORNIAN QUAIL (*Calipepla californica*).—Especially well adapted to the manuka scrub forest country, keeping close to roads or other open spaces. Along 5–6 miles of road there were 4 parties of 8–12 each, including both adults and some of the juveniles already flying. They frequently visit the roads and Full James Camp was regularly visited by one party in the morning; they seem to keep to their respective territories.
2. NEW ZEALAND HARRIER (*Circus gouldii*). Whilst plentiful close to Lake Taupo, less abundant in this region. However, saw 4–5 birds within a 10 miles radius of Full James.
3. PIPIT (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*). Ranks third in this district. Especially abundant close to open roads, firebreaks and other cleared spaces. During a half-day tramp at least 30 birds observed.