

purpose of this note is simply to put a further incidence of probable intraspecific killing on record and I leave it to others to theorize as why this behaviour occurs.

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Nankeen Night Herons (*Nycticorax caledonicus*) on the Whanganui River

On 17 February 1994, while on a survey for native fish in the Whanganui River, I observed five Nankeen Night Herons (*Nycticorax caledonicus*) take flight from willows beside the wharf at Pipiriki (39°33' S; 175°05' E). One was in adult plumage and four were mottled immature birds. While travelling downriver for about 8 km, I saw three more Nankeen Night Herons take flight, of which one was an adult and two were immatures. These birds flew a short distance up-river. A further kilometre downriver, another heron was observed sitting on a dead willow branch. This bird was in adult plumage and had a white plume along its nape. Throughout the summer, Nankeen Night Herons were reported as far downstream as the Ahuahu Stream confluence with the Whanganui River and Kemp's Pole, some 80 km south of Pipiriki. The maximum number seen in one group was ten, over a 1 km stretch of river.

No sightings were made of Nankeen Night Herons during May and June. When the willows that border the river had lost their leaves, a search was made by boat for likely nests, but this proved unsuccessful. On 5 December 1994, four Nankeen Night Herons were seen in the Jerusalem area. A local farmer reported that they were on his property during the previous winter. From the river, I saw birds flying from this property in the evening. Several birds were filmed on video and photographs have been

taken, which enabled their identity to be confirmed as Nankeen Night Herons. John Milnes (pers. comm.) of Ahu Ahu described a bird which matched a Nankeen Night Heron, that he saw at the confluence of the Whanganui River and Ahuahu Stream in 1994. Over the past five years, there have been various unconfirmed reports of 'flocks of bitterns' seen flying along the river in the Pipiriki to Jerusalem area, and it now seems likely that these have been Nankeen Night Herons.

There has been no confirmed breeding of the Nankeen Night Heron in New Zealand (Williams 1985, Turbott 1990). Because there are at least ten birds, including adults (one in breeding plumage) and immature birds, seen repeatedly in 1994, and perhaps for some years earlier in one part of the Whanganui River valley, there is a strong possibility that a breeding population exists here. More intensive observations will be made of the birds during the spring of 1995 to find nests and to establish whether juveniles are reared successfully.

At least 15 documented records are known for the Nankeen Night Heron in New Zealand (Williams 1985). Nearly all of these were of single immature birds (loc. cit.) although single adults were recorded in the Wellington region in 1972 and in 1977 (Turbott 1990). The only previous record in which breeding in New Zealand was suspected was near Blenheim in 1958. This was based on a possible sighting of an adult bird with breeding plumes and a confirmed sighting of two immature birds together, two-three months later (Bell 1958, Williams 1985).

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