Notornis

In continuation of New Zealand Bird Notes.



Bulletin of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand. Published Quarterly.

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Edited by R. H. D. STIDOLPH, 114 Cole Street, Masterton.

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ILLUSTRATIONS.—Plate I., Whimbrel, 2; Plates II. and III., Banded Dotterel, 8; Plate IV., Royal Albatross, 15.

EDITORIAL.

Members will notice that with this issue, the name of this publication has been changed to "Notornis." This is in accordance with a resolution passed by the annual meeting of members held in Wellington on May 19.

In the first three years' existence of the society its publications were issued in cyclostyled form, as annual reports in 1940 and 1941, and as bulletins in 1941-42. Then it was decided to have the bulletins printed and the first in this form, under the title of "N.Z. Bird Notes," was issued in January, 1943. The title was extended to "New Zealand Bird Notes" in July, 1946.

Ever since the inception of the society many members favoured the adoption of a bird name for its publication, and at the annual meeting in 1949 a recommendation was made to the incoming committee to arrange for a change of name, members being invited to consider ''Notornis,'' or alternatively, to offer other suggestions. The committee, after careful consideration, decided, by a majority decision, to recommend ''Notornis'' to the annual meeting held this year. The meeting approved that name by a substantial majority of votes.

The adoption of "Notornis" (of Greek derivation, meaning "Southern Bird") as the name of the society's publication follows the practice observed by many ornithological societies overseas of using a bird name, and it is felt that members generally will welcome the change, although some may differ as to the choice of a name. As in the past with "New Zealand Bird Notes," it is intended to continue the policy of including in "Notornis" articles and notes of interest to all classes of members.

ASIATIC WHIMBREL AT PETONE.

By C. A. Fleming, Wellington.

Wellington has no extensive tidal flats to attract vast flocks of migrant waders to spend the summer, but, as noted by Stidolph (N.Z. Bird Notes, vol. 3, No. 5, p. 126) the west coast of the province lies on at least a subsidiary migration route, so that birds on passage are recorded from time to time, chiefly during the southward movement in late spring. The northern shore of Port Nicholson, now closely populated and somewhat industrialised, is no longer so suitable a habitat for migrant waders as it was in the early days of European settlement. In the spring of 1949, however, at small party of migrants, consisting of Pacific bar-tailed godwit (Limosa lapponica) and an Asiatic whimbrel (Numenius phacopus variegatus) spent several days on Petone Beach before passing on to more suitable feeding grounds.

The whimbrel was first seen on October 22 and last seen on October 31, 1949. The godwit numbered seven on October 22 and 23, twelve on October 29 and 30, and had dropped to nine on the 31st, when last seen. At different times the birds were observed by D. H. Brathwaite, T. Cockcroft, J. M. Cunningham, R. A. Falla, R. R. Hutton, and the writer. When first seen (by C.A.F.) the whimbrel was in flight, with black-backed gulls (Larus dominicanus), near the end of Tory Street. It settled repeatedly on the inter-tidal sand flats but flew on disturbance and circled over Petone. Later, seven godwit were located near the mouth of Korokoro Stream. On October 23 the whimbrel was feeding, at first high on the dry sand, later on the wet sand, near to, but not associating with seven godwit, about 200 yards east of Korokoro Stream (T.C. and J.M.C.). Disturbed by people, dogs and black-backed gulls, it flew erratically at about 100 feet over Petone town, calling almost incessantly, and eventually disappeared. During the following week, Welliarton environment a wild conthering how they wind had returned in Wellington experienced a mild southerly, but the wind had returned ic the north before October 29, when Dr. R. A. Falla found the whimbrel still at Petone, associating with 12 godwit. On October 30, at high tide, the whimbrel accompanied 12 godwit, feeding on dry sand and at the water's edge. Much disturbance kept the birds moving between Korokoro Stream and Petone wharf. The godwit fed voraciously and con-stantly, plunging their bills "to the hilt," and the whimbrel dabbled less enthusiastically. In contrast with its previous noisy behaviour, the whimbrel was silent all morning, and the godwit uttered merely subdued chattering as they fed, or just as they rose into the air when flushed. On October 31, D.H.B. and R.R.H. found the whimbrel, with nine godwit, still on the Petone foreshore, but they were not seen again.

When first observed, the whimbrel tended to be solitary and noisy, circling widely when flushed, and uttering a loud and arresting call on D (eight "white notes" above middle C), repeated 7 or 8 times, which justified the name of "seven-whistler," but I would not consider any of the calls "sweetly rippling," "a rippling trill," or "a pretty trilling call" as they have sometimes been described. Later in its stay, the whimbrel adopted the party of godwit, but usually kept to one side of them, was more nervous in behaviour, fed less assiduously, and always led the flock in flight.

The field characters of the whimbrel have been discussed in recent numbers of "N.Z. Bird Notes," (Sibson, Stidolph, vol. 2, No. 2; Mc-Kenzie, vol. 3, No. 2). The Wellington bird appeared heavier and longerwinged than godwit in the air, but slimmer than godwit on the ground. Its alert nervousness always gave it height above the feeding godwit. Its darker colour, particularly on its barred flanks and streaked chest, was evident both in flight and on the ground; the legs were bluish grey and appeared paler than godwits' in sunlight; the bill dark, with a light fleshy-orange base to the mandible. When flying side on, the dorsal colour appeared almost uniform, so that at first I thought the bird was the Hudsonian whimbrel (N. p. hudsonicus), but Cunningham, who had





Photos: C. A. Fleming. ASIATIC WHIMBREL and BAR-TAILED GODWIT, Petone Beach.

recently observed whimbrels at Lord Howe Island, was able to see the diagnostic pale rump of variegatus when the bird flew away from him, and this character was amply confirmed on October 30.

Northern Hemisphere waders on migration in New Zealand usually feed or rest on broad sand and mudflats or banks, offering little cover to the photographer. The whimbrel has not previously been caught by a New Zealand camera, and even the godwit, commonest of migrant waders, has seldom, if ever, been photographed feeding naturally. The accompanying pictures were taken at Petone on October 30 with an "Exacta," fitted with 6-inch lens.

NORTH ISLAND THRUSH.

By W. P. Mead, Wanganui.

The writer spent four days, March 14 to 17, 1950, on the Wanganu River with a survey party. The Maori captain of the boat, Andrew Anderson, has been 40 years on the river, and is a man with a real love of the native birds and bush. When in conversation with him regarding birds that we might see on the trip, I learned that a bird he called the 'toatoa,' apparently the native thrush, was present in the bush alongside the river. The bird was known also to Mr. R. Oxley, a younger Maori member of the party, educated at Te Aute College, to whom I am indebted for information on the correct spelling and usage of the Maori names for the thrush, he having had these confirmed by an elderly Maori of Koroniti.

Most of the following information was given me by Anderson before we heard and saw the bird, but information given later by both men is included. The common name of the North Island thrush, along the river, is "toatoa," but Anderson had been told by his elder brother that its correct name is "tiutiu," or tiutiukata." The addition of the word "kata" to "tiutiu" is used when it is desired to better describe the bird (just as we use "thrush" or, more particularly, "song thrush," for the introduced bird). Anderson first noticed the toatoa along the reaches of the river below Retaruke about 12 or 14 years ago, that is, not long before the tourist service on that part of the river was discontinued owing to the war. He described it as a brown bird the size of the introduced thrush, or slightly larger, inquisitive and tame, yet in a way shy. It would often appear when a wild pig was killed, but on noticing that it had been observed, would fly away, frequently returning and flying past for one more look before going away altogether. It feeds on the ground as well as on the trees, sings somewhat like the introduced thrush, and has a way of turning its head to one side, listening, then to the other side and listening again. It appears to be increasing in numbers and extending its range alongside the river.

The noise of the boat's engine prevented us from hearing bird calls, but on March 15, near Opuraha, when we were alongside the bank with the engine idling (we were picking up a pig which had been shot from the boat) I heard a call, new to me, from a tree not 20 feet away, which Anderson said, before I had time to question him about it, was the call of the toatoa. We could not see the bird and as we were running late, could not wait on the chance of finding it. The call heard on this occasion was the first two phrases of the thrush's song as I heard it later, on March 17. There was a good deal of noise and I could not hear more.

We tied up for the night at Te Auroa. Soon after daylight on March 16, during the bustle of getting ready for an early start, we heard more calls, double whistles and chirping calls, which Anderson said were from the toatoa. There seemed to be two or more of the birds only a chain or two away in the bush, but again there was no time to investigate.

Returning downstream, after reaching Retaruke, we pulled in after dark that night above Otaahua. On the morning of March 17 the song of the toatoa was heard again. There was one singing across the river. while on our side there were probably two or more, not far away up the steep hillside. This time it was possible for Mr. O. D. Bell and myself to take an hour ashore without delaying the party. A somewhat difficult scramble took us to some tawa trees on a very steep dry spur, where the birds appeared to be feeding (probably on grubs) in the moss on the big limbs of the trees. We saw the thrush on two different trees, but could not be certain that the second bird seen when returning may not have been the same bird that we saw further up, as it could have turned back out of sight and commenced feeding again behind us. In addition to fleeting glimpses as the birds worked along the limbs almost hidden by intervening leaves, I saw the birds perching twice, at about 25 and 20 feet distance, and three times flying, distant 20 feet and less. In addition, Mr. Bell had a view of one bird when perching and singing, so clear that he remarked that he could see its bill moving as it sang.

There was the usual difficulty in distinguishing colour and small markings that one has in looking up against the light at birds in shade in the bush. But we had clear views of the principal features of the bird, size, shape, dark and light parts, etc. Its size we estimated by comparison with well-known birds; about the size of a blackbird, or dis-tinctly larger than a bell-bird, and smaller than a tui; a longer bird for its girth than the common thrush. Once only the lighting allowed me to get an impression of brown colour. The upper parts of head and back appeared very dark; the underside of the bird when perching in deep shade showed dark head, white throat, grey breast and abdomen, very light on lower part of abdomen, and dark tail. The shape of the tail was particularly noticed as the bird dived down and soared up again "for a last look at us" as Anderson said, when we told him The end of the tail appeared somewhat forked, but the two of it. "prongs" with rounded, not sharp, ends. Besides intermittent calls, the birds stopped feeding from time to time, to sing once through, a song of five, or occasionally, six phrases. The first and fifth phrases were the same, a loud sweet-toned note repeated about six times. In the intermediate three phrases, three other notes were used, a lower note, a very high note, and a chirping note, but one note only, repeated about six times, was used in each phrase. These five phrases were, therefore, of equal length. The sixth phrase, if added, was shorter, either two or four notes, or the double whistle previously mentioned, sometimes repeated.

Later on the same day the call was heard again at Upper Mangapapa. This was the fourth place at which it was heard along 16 miles of the river, the straight line distance between the lower and upper places being ten miles. As nothing could be heard above the noise of the engine when the boat was moving, it is evident that there must have been many times the number of birds calling than those we heard. On returning to Wanganui we examined the specimens of North Island thrush in the museum and satisfied ourselves that our identification of the birds was correct.

The following is Mr. Bell's independent account of the bird as seen and heard by him:---

On the night of March 16 we camped at the first bend up stream from the Otaahua rapid on the right bank of the Wanganui River. We heard the toatoa calling from daylight on Friday, March 17. The term "toatoa" is a name used by the captain of the river boat to describe this particular bird. It is undoubtedly a misnomer, toatoa being the Maori name of the mountain tanekaha. We had heard the same call on the previous day at Te Auroa, where we camped on Wednesday night. The note or call was identified by Mr. R. Oxley and Mr. Anderson, the captain of the river boat, both of whom have had a lifetime of experience in the bush in the Wanganui River region. On the morning of Friday, March 17, Mr. W. Mead and I climbed the ridge adjacent to our camping place and followed the call. The bird was

finally located in a mossy tawa tree and appeared to be feeding on the grubs, etc., in the moss. I saw it distinctly from a distance of about 20 feet, but it was against the light and I could not be sure of the colour except that it was a dark coloured bird. The bird was facing me and had a fairly large yellowy white marking below the breast about at the abdomen. Shortly afterwards it flew away and in flight it appeared to have a longish tail and flew with a swooping flight. I should say that the size of the bird would be between that of the ordinary thrush and the blackbird. It was definitely larger than the thrush. The song was very like that of the ordinary thrush-very clear and consisted of several distinct notes. I saw the bird between 8 a.m. and 8.30 a.m. The morning was clear and sunny and visibility was good. From the calls, there appeared to be several of these birds in the locality and also, judging by the calls we heard previously, they appear to be fairly well established on the river reaches between Mangapurua and Wade's Landing. Anderson said that these birds are showing up near Pipiriki. According to him, the appearance of the "toatoa" on the Wanganui River is recent-only within the last few years. We could not see detailed markings of the bird, which was feeding in the centre of the tree and only came out to the edge where I saw it, preparatory to flying away. I have since examined the specimen of the North Island thrush in the Wanganui Museum and I am satisfied that it is identical with the toatoa observed at Otaahua and described above."

The following are the latest dates I have of the North Island thrush being seen in other parts of this same forest, which extends from the Wanganui River area westward to the farm lands of Taranaki:—By Mr. G. W. Topp, at Upper Waitotara, about 1896, and inland from Patea, in 1922 or 1923 (after killing a pig); by Mr. Butler, near Koroniti, in 1917; an unconfirmed report from the Whangamomona district, in 1930. From the several references to the bird coming when a wild pig was killed, it appears that it is attracted by any unusual loud noise in the bush, but from our observations it seems to take considerable care when perched to get a view out, to keep itself in shade or partly hidden.

Both Mr. Bell and I feel that considering that so little is known of the native thrush someone with much more time to spare than we had should undertake a study of the bird as soon as possible. We believe that we could find a fairly easy way in to the area where it now is, and that there should be no difficulty in finding the birds when in song. But we have no information regarding possible seasonal migrations or silent periods, so that a search at a different season might produce no results.

VISIT TO RETARUKE, MAY, 1950.

On May 8, Mr. J. Moreland and I arrived at Retaruke to investigate the possibility of travelling overland into the area where the thrush was present in March. The start of the route on the east side of the river appeared too difficult for fast travelling, but on May 9, by crossing to the west, we were able to reach the most northerly point at which the thrush had been heard in March, and where it was seen. The birds were not calling, or perhaps had moved either downstream or away from the river. Owing to the rough nature of the country we could not have continued much further downstream and returned before dark, nor were we prepared for camping, so explored the spurs back from the river, without hearing the bird.

On the following two days, in addition to another walk downstream, we went upstream and also up a branch valley, since there might be some possibility of the bird being present in bush near to roads or tracks. The bird was not heard, and as it is not known to local settlers, it is probable that the point at which it was seen on March 17 marks the northern limit of its present habitat in the river valley. Whether it moves about or is silent at times, and therefore, almost impossible to find, is a matter for further investigation, for which an expedition much deeper into the area would be necessary. Downstream there is heavy bush for fifty miles alongside the river. Upstream there are clearings, though much bush still remains. The robin also appears to favour the area where the bush is continuous, as in every gully we crossed downstream we saw or heard robins, whereas none was in evidence in the bush-covered gullies between clearings upstream.

[Confirmation of Mr. Mead's report of the presence of the native thrush in the Wanganui River district will be awaited with keen interest. It is unfortunate that a more precise and more detailed description of the bird's plumage and appearance could not have been given, sufficient to prove that the bird was the species it is believed to be, but the difficulties of doing so in heavy bush country are fully recognised. The omission of certain salient points precludes a definite conclusion about the identity of the birds from the description supplied.—Ed.]

PAST AND FUTURE OF THE SOCIETY. PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS AT ANNUAL MEETING.

The president, Mr. E. G. Turbott, in his address at the society's annual meeting, said:—-''It is of particular interest that tonight the secretary presents the society's tenth annual report. The first meeting was held in May, 1940, and this is, therefore, an important anniversary in the life of the society. I should like to initiate this annual meeting by referring briefly to certain aspects of the society's work past and future. In thinking of this I have found it interesting to read again the brief paragraph in our constitution which originally gave the society's aims and objects and was repeated in our first publication: Annual Report No. 1, for 1939-40.

"The paragraph differs from most formal statements of aims and objects in that it is brief, and, I think, inspiring: 'The object of the society is to encourage, organise and carry out field work on birds on a national scale.' It goes on to state that the collecting of specimens is not one of the society's objects, and this sentence ends with a further telling phrase that the society is 'concerned with the study of living birds in their natural state.' I think that now, on its tenth anniversary, the society can claim to have progressed very effectively towards this end. If nothing else had been achieved it could at least be claimed that in these ten years of its growth the society has seen the craze for birdwatching 'catch-on' in New Zealand.

"Bird-watchers in New Zealand are perhaps a less varied assemblage than is the same group in Britain, where, according to James Fisher's well-known book, they range from a Prime Minister to at least forty-six schoolmasters! But from the first our membership has represented a wide cross-section of the community, all with a common interest in birds, although with their many different points of view. Bird-watching has been referred to as both a hobby and a science, and it is one of its chief attractions that, while retaining an all-absorbing fascination, it has a noteworthy contribution to make to scientific bird study. I wish to refer to this because I should like to express our special indebtedness to those who have held one particular office of the society—that of editor of our publication.

"The society has planned a number of co-operative investigations, some of which have proved too ambitious, and some, like the gannet census, which are going with a swing. I think, however, that our main achievement in the past ten years has been the steady recording in our early reports and 'New Zealand Bird Noćes' of observations which have filled many gaps in our knowledge of the habits and distribution of New Zealand birds. In this our editors have set a particularly high standard, and the successive bulletins have, I think, given a lead to many observers who might not have passed beyond the stage of accumulating interesting but unrelated facts. Our thanks are due, in particular, to Dr. R. A. Falla and Professor B. J. Marples—also respectively, the society's first president and secretary—who were joint editors during the extremely important period up to 1945; and to Mr. R. H. D. Stidolph, who has so admirably expanded and maintained 'New Zealand Bird Notes' since then, and who will, we hope, survive the impact of the new name to be proposed for the journal.

"In the early stages of the society in particular, the summarised notes were most important in drawing contributions from so many members. As the society and the status of New Zealand bird study moves towards maturity, it may have to be considered whether some of this accumulating material might not be better collated at longer intervals instead of being written up annually. It might be noted that the ambitious aim of the early summarised notes was to give each year an indication of the distribution and status of native and introduced birds. Subsequently, more general data on such aspects as breeding and migration accumulated, and the summarising of all this material is likely to be an increasingly difficult task with every year. Such thoughts as this indicate that the society and its journal have still perhaps not ended their growing pains.

"On the other hand, signs of maturity are the increasingly high standard of individual contributions to the bulletin; the initiation, with the ringing of the first bird on February 27, 1950, of our long-planned ringing scheme; the establishment of a Checklist Committee of certain members who have undertaken to draw up a revised check-list of New Zealand birds for the society; and, lastly, the natural growth in several centres of groups of our members who join as often as they can in field work and discussion, discussion interrupted, I may say, only by the impulse to leave again for the field. With these brief remarks I have much pleusure in welcoming you here again and in opening this meeting."

BIRDS AT WAIMUMU BUSH, SOUTHLAND.—The following birds were recorded during a walk of about 1½ miles through bush beside the Upper Waimumu Stream, Hokonui Hills, 9 miles from Gore, on 29/1/49: Three wood pigeons, 3 riflemen, 6 fantails, 4 tomtits, one silver-eye and two small flocks of brown creepers, 5 plus and 10. Grey warblers were heard on four occasions. The weather at the time was very windy, and only three bellbirds were heard. Several days later, during a calm misty morning, many bellbirds were singing gloriously and continuously.— W. A. Watters, Gore.

ADVANCE OF THE ROSELLA IN NORTH AUCKLAND .--- Fleming (1944: N.Z. Bird Notes, Vol. 1, p. 60 and map p. 59) gives the range of the eastern rosella (Platycercus eximitus) in 1944 as extending north to Wellsford, and to Leigh on the east coast; there had been no records from the Kaiwaka-Maungaturoto district immediately to the north of Wellsford, or from the country bordering on the Kaipara Harbour north of The following reports which I received from more northern Tauhoa. districts indicate the extent to which the rosella is increasing its range. On 26th November, 1949, Mrs. J. A. Goodwin wrote describing two rosellas which she had seen at Maungaturoto for some weeks previously, with a sketch of one which had been killed by a cat. Mr. R. F. Graham has given me information from the Mangapai South district, some fifteen miles in a direct line to the south of Whangarei: the parakeet was first seen here in April or May, 1949, and has since been observed regularly. On the east coast, a member of the society, Mr. D. G. McMillan, reports that the rosella has been well established at Mangawai since 1946 when he came to the district; Mr. McMillan also mentions this bird's attacks on fruit. On occasional trips along the Auckland-Whangarei main highway between 1946 and 1950 I have observed the rosella only as far north as Wellsford-Te Hana, and have received reports from others who in passing along this highway have noticed it in the latter district .--- E. G. Turbott, Auckland Museum.

PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF BIRDS OF N.Z.-IV. BANDED DOTTEREL.

The banded dotterel, in contrast to the larger and much rarer New Zealand dotterel, is found in most districts of the Dominion and at the Chatham Islands, frequenting estuaries, beaches, shingle river-beds, sparsely-grassed pastures, notably in the higher country, and occasionally, especially in the non-breeding season, lands recently cropped. In the autumn and winter it congregates into flocks, sometimes numbering hundreds of birds. When breeding it is dispersed widely, mainly on the shingle river-beds and in estuaries. The bird begins to breed in August and continues normally until the end of the year, though odd birds may be found in January with young still in their care. In full breeding plumage the banded dotterel is recognised without difficulty, as no other bird in New Zealand has two distinctive bands on its underparts, as is the case with this species.

Much more information is required about the bird's movements in the non-breeding season. There is evidence of a considerable northward movement from the South to the North Island and of a partial migration across the Tasman Sea to Australia, where this dotterel has never been recorded as a breeding species. Some birds, however, remain in the South Island, and a much larger number in the North Island, especially in the Auckland province.

The movements of the banded dotterel was one of the subjects selected for special study by the society some years ago, under the organisation of C. A. Fleming and R. H. D. Stidolph, but surprisingly little information was received from many areas, in spite of an appeal for detailed reports about the bird's movements. In view of this position, it may be of interest to republish the desiderata required (vide 'Interim Report on Banded Dotterel Movements,'' Second Annuai Report, 1941):---

- 1. South Island data from representative inland and coastal localities.
- 2. More details from North Island, e.g., Bay of Plenty, Taranaki, etc., to ascertain limits between areas of winter scarcity (Wellington) and of winter abundance (Auckland).
- 3. More breeding season data—earliest and latest egg dates for all localities; possible correlation between duration of season and extent of migration or latitude.
- 4. Numbers of stated localities, at least monthly, for a year, sufficient for representation by graphs, are most helpful.
- 5. Evidence of birds leaving or arriving from overseas is badly wanted.
- 6. Ultimately leg-ringing operations will be necessary.

The photographs with this issue are excellent studies of this bird, one showing a dotterel sitting on its nest, and the other a bird in the act of displaying. Both were taken on the Ashley River-bed by Mr. K. V. Bigwood, of Christchurch.—R.H.D.S.

SILVER-EYE EATING LARGE MOTH (Porina).—When I was on holiday at Levin during the May school vacation this year, I saw a silver-eye in a garden catch a fairly large moth, which it battered on a stem of chrysanthemum. The moth fell to the ground several times but was retrieved and reduced finally to a pulp and eaten. The wings were left lying on the ground. The silver-eye preened its feathers for a time, still in the chrysanthemum, and then dropped to the ground and ate the moth's wings. It was one of a small flock, which was accompanied by a fantail. The fantail snapped up insects disturbed by the silver-eyes.— (Mrs.) N. F. Stidolph, Masterton. PLATE II.



BANDED DOTTEREL ON NEST, Ashley River-bed, Canterbury.



BANDED DOTTEREL DISPLAYING AT NEST SITE, Ashley River-bed, Canterbury.

SOCIETY'S ANNUAL MEETING.

The Ornithological Society of New Zealand held its annual general meeting in the Dominion Museum, Wellington, on Friday evening, May 19, 1950. The president, Mr. E. G. Turbott, was in the chair, and there was an attendance of about 35 members from most parts of New Zealand.

After the presidential address by Mr. Turbott, the committee's annual report and audited financial statement were read and approved. The secretary was instructed to write a letter to the printers expressing appreciation of their co-operation.

The annual report stated: "Your committee, in presenting its tenth annual report for the year ended March 31, 1950, is pleased to record progress in the society's several spheres of activity. Largely owing to the number of endowment members enrolled during the year, it has been possible to increase the number of illustrations in 'New Zealand Bird Notes,' and this has proved popular. An increased income has been derived from the sale of back numbers which members want to complete their files, and the year has seen the completion of Volume 3. Membership continues to grow, the total now being 484, made up of ordinary 341, endowment 112, life 30, and honorary 1. Of these, 316 were paid to date, and 88 have paid in advance, some for several years. Owing to the steadily increasing number of members, it has been necessary this year to have envelopes and invoices typed professionally. The cost of the journal per member will show to what extent the society is dependent on endowment members and donations. Taking the average number of members during the year as 459, the cost per member was 7s. 6¹/₂d.

"Thanks to the generosity of the director of the Auckiand Institute and Museum, Dr. Gilbert Archey, our library is now housed at the museum, and it is hoped that members will make increasing use of it, as the world's leading ornithological journals are received by the society. Interest in ornithology continues to grow apace, and it is a healthy sign that an increasing number of field trips is made by members in the lesser known districts. Enthusiasm in the organising of field work is largely responsible for the sound position of the society today.

"This year represents an anniversary for the society, for it is just ten years since the inaugural meeting was held in the Canterbury Museum, on May 24, 1940, the attendance being eight. Since that time, progress has been steady, as is shown by the following membership totals at the end of each financial year:--1941, 53; 1942, 77; 1943, 120; 1944, 180; 1945, 200; 1946, 240; 1947, 340; 1948, 370; 1949, 435; 1950, 484. During this period the society's activities have been correspondingly expanded. From the initial annual report has sprung the present quarterly journal, and there has been a number of special investigations contributed to by many members. A checklist of New Zealand birds is being prepared and a ringing scheme is under way. The nucleus of an ornithological library has grown rapidly and film evenings and field trips have become a regular feature of annual meetings. The society is becoming known the world over and the journal is sent to 49 overseas members and institutions with which exchanges are made.

"Thanks are again expressed to Mr. F. E. Wells for his auditing of the financial statement."

The report was presented for the committee by the hon. secretary-treasurer, Mr. J. M. Cunningham.

The annual report and the balance sheet were adopted.

No election being necessary, the officers for 1950-51 were declared elected, as detailed on page 1.

The report of the Ringing Committee, which was read by the convener, Mr. J. M. Cunningham, stated: "After many years of investigation and discussion, the scheme was launched during the year, and a small number of birds has been ringed. 17,000 rings in a full range of sizes, have been obtained and catalogued, and are now available for issue to members. Rings have so far been issued to three persons, and it is hoped that full scale ringing will take place next spring. Many inquiries from overseas have been received concerning the administration of the scheme. The society is particularly interested in ringing white-fronted tern and gannets, and it is hoped to extend ringing to black and redbilled gulls, Caspian terns and stilts, permission for the ringing of these birds having been obtained. The necessary forms for application to ring and for recording results have been printed. It is desirable for all members who wish to participate in the ringing scheme to make immediate application."

In reply to a question by Mr. J. H. Sorensen, it was stated that it was hoped that members would supply full details of all ringing carried out prior to the inception of the society's scheme. Mr. Sorensen intimated that his own records would be sent to the society for inclusion in its official records.

The report of the Checklist Committee, read by its convener, Mr. C. A. Fleming, stated: "The committee was appointed in July, 1949, and operates by correspondence. Five sections of a draft checklist prepared by the convener (Charadriiformes, by R. B. Sibson) have been circulated, accompanied by circulars inviting comments from members. The committee is deeply indebted to Mr. D. H. Brathwaite, who has typed most of the draft. The proposed list will contain the scientific name, an approved vernacular, status and distribution, and literature references (later than 1930) for each species and acceptable subspecies of New Zealand birds, including those which have become extinct and those which have been introduced since the beginning of European settlement. By May, 1950, approximately half of the 340 items in the draft list have been circulated for criticism. It is proposed to inform committee members of majority decisions and to take votes on controversial items of nomenclature, status, etc. At the present rate of progress, it is anticipated that the manuscript will be completed before the end of 1951. **

In accordance with notice of motion, Dr. R. A. Falla moved and Mr. E. Dear seconded, "That in Clause 16 of the constitution, the words 'N.Z. Bird Notes' be deleted and replaced by 'Notornis.'" This change of name of the society's bulletin, which was recommended by the outgoing committee, was fully discussed by the meeting and passed by a majority of 22 to 6.

The arrangements for the field trip the following day were announced.

Mr. R. B. Sibson was appointed the society's representative at the tenth International Ornithological Congress, at Upsala, Sweden.

Thanks were expressed to the Royal Society for the use of its rooms, and films taken by Dr. Falla, Messrs. Sorensen and Turbott were shown to the meeting, which concluded with supper.

FIELD DAY AT WAIKANAE.

A field excursion to the Waikanae River-mouth on the day following the annual meeting gave members an admirable opportunity to see birds typical of West Coast estuaries during winter months. Thirty-three members attended and fine weather and a friendly atmosphere among members made the day a most enjoyable one.

In the evening, members were the guests of Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Fleming at their residence in Wadestown, where a screening of films taken by Mr. J. H. Sorensen on Campbell Island, showing the domestic lives of albatrosses, mollymawks, penguins and other species provided a most interesting and educational programme, which was much appreciated. Members were entertained at supper by Mr. and Mrs. Fleming.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT for year ended 31/3/1950.

	~						
a	£	8.	d.		£	8.	. d.
Subs., 1949, and arrears .	140	5	0	"N.Z. Bird Notes"			
Donations	16	9	3	Vol. 3, Nos. 69	97	4	. 9
Sales (back numbers)	21	5	1	Illustrations	17	9	6
Interest, P.O.S.B.	7	6	6	Envelopes	13	13	1
	•			Stationery	6	15	6
				Typing	5	14	6
				Postages	13	5	6
				Sundry		11	11
				Library Expenses	6	3	10
				Rings and Records Cards,			
				£62/7/10, less Ringing			
				Fund transferred, £50	12	- 7	10
				Excess of Income over Ex-			
				penditure transferred to			
				General Fund	11	19	5
	÷						
	± 185	5	10		± 185	5	10

BALANCE SHEET as at 31/3/1950.

LIABILITIES.

Subr noid in advance	£ s. d.	Subs in arrange estimate	£	8.	đ.
Sundry Creditors (a/cs.	26 0 0	ed to realise	2 11	0 6	0 0
General Reserve	133 12 10	Cash		4 6 6	0 9 1
Andita	£318 2 10 ed and found	correct F. E. Wells,	£318 2/5/50.	2	10

(A more detailed audited statement of the accounts was presented to the annual meeting and copies may be obtained on application.)

RINGING IN NEW ZEALAND .- As mentioned elsewhere in this issue, members who have carried out ringing of birds are invited to make their records available to the society. It is suggested that this be done not only to duplicate records in case of possible loss, but also because it is desirable to have all records kept in a uniform system in a single file, for future reference. Forms suitable for this are available from the undersigned and will be sent to any member who requests them. A different form should be used for each species, and the approximate number required should be stated. Each sheet holds about 45 ring numbers. It is emphasised that all records of any species ringed are desired, however insignificant they may appear. It is proposed to publish a summary of the numbers of all species ringed on the lines of overseas summaries. It would be appreciated if those members who have large numbers of records, which will naturally take some time to duplicate, would in the meantime provide a list of species ringed to date, and the number of "recoveries" (birds recorded more than two miles from "where ringed," more than three months later, and dead birds) .-- J. M. Cunningham, Masterton.

A HUIA-BILLED STARLING.—A report that a huia had been seen in a Masterton garden recently caused me to raise my eyebrows, but when I saw the bird in my own garden I realised at once that there was some justification for that statement. The bird, a starling, had a perfectly formed down-curved bill, resembling that of the female huia, and about three times the usual length of a starling's bill; that is, it was about three inches long. The bird was watched for some minutes feeding on scraps with two normal starlings and it appeared to have considerablie difficulty in gathering up its food, as its tongue, which was of normal length, was not of much assistance. The food was picked up in the bill and the head and bill were then elevated to allow the food to drop downwards, a fair amount falling out of its bill in the process. It wiped its bill frequently on the ground with a scythe-like motion. The bird looked to be in good fettle. It was seen on December 20, 1949.---R.H.D. Stidolph, Masterton.

PLANT MATERIAL FROM GANNETS' NESTS.

By L. B. Moore, Botany Division, and K. Wodzicki, Animal Ecology Section, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research.

Various plants play an important part in the breeding activities of the Australasian gannet (Sula serrator). The male bird picks up seaweed and sometimes flotsam at sea, and occasionally gathers material in the vicinity of the nesting site. These pieces are offered to the partner during the "presentation" display, and are used in the early stages of breeding for nest construction. It should, however, be stressed that plant and other material carried up by the gannets together form only a small part of the nest, the bulk heing built up gradually by the excreta into the well-known typical guano mound.

Oliver (1930) states that gannet nests are "often well formed of seaweed, generally the common brown **Carpophyllum**, but sometimes plants such as **Chenopodium** are also used." The British Handbook (Witherby, 1943) describes the nests of the North Atlantic gannet (Sula bassana) as being "built often of seaweeds, especially tangle (Laminaria) and Fucus, though grasses and campion (Silene) are also used, and any kind of flotsam and jetsam may be carried to the nest."

Since so little has been recorded of the species of plants found in gannets' nests in New Zealand, samples of fresh material were collected at the Cape Kidnappers gannetries, Hawke's Bay, and at those on White Island, in the Bay of Plenty. The table lists the species found and gives some indication of their relative importance.

	KID	CAPE NAPPER	s whi	TE ISLAND
	Gannetry C Oct., 1949	Gannetry A Nov., 1949	Rocky Point Gannetry B 26/11/49	West Point. Gannetry 27/11/49
SEAWEEDS-				
Brown	i '	·		
Carpophyllum plumosum	f	all	a	a
C. maschalocarpum	t t		b	b . ·
C. maschalocarpum, pool form	í t		íí	
C. flexuosum			c	. C
Cystophora retroffexa			C C	
Sargassum sinclairii	Ľ.		. · · ·	· · · ·
Giossophora kunthii	Т		[[`:	
Green-				
Enteromorpha acanthophora				. 6
Red—-				
Plocamium sp.	·		ι <u>α</u>	
Fterociadia lucida				}
FLOWERING PLANTS-				_
Mesembryanthemium australe				†
Coprosma repens				
Creas			*	I. T
UTASS				· .

PLANTS FROM GANNETS' NESTS.

0 4 D.T.

1; present; *, trace; a, b, c, d, order of importance by quantity.

No conclusions could be based on such a small amount of material. It may, however, be pointed out that the list (like Witherby's (loc. cit.)) includes both seaweeds and flowering plants of species growing near the nests. The bulk of the material in each case was of the two coarse brown seaweeds Carpophyllum plumosum and C. maschalocarpum. These are the most abundant weeds about low tide level and in drift both at Cape Kidnappers and at White Island. Plants of the first five species in the table float readily but Glossophora and the green and red weeds, though they are brought ashore in drift, are not particularly buoyant and one would hardly expect them to be easily picked up on the sea surface. The presence of the pool form of C. maschalocarpum in a Cape Kidnappers nest suggests also that, at least in some cases, seaweed is picked up close inshore. As in the case of the Atlantic gannet, the principal seaweeds used are the large and easily available ones, without any indication that these have been specially selected.

The flowering plants all belong to species growing in the immediate vicinity of the colony and are probably taken at random. These plants were not recorded in the samples from Cape Kidnappers where little of such vegetation is available. Finally, it may be added that amongst flotsam picked up by gannets a breast-skin with feathers of a cock pheasant was noted at Cape Kidnappers.

It is intended to carry this survey of the nesting material further during this year's breeding season. The authors would be grateful if any visitors to gametries in the spring of 1950 would co-operate by providing further nesting material. Since the weeds are invariably fouled in the nest, they should be either thoroughly dried or well sterilised with formalin or otherwise before being parcelled up for despatch.

Seaweeds from a shag's nest, to be reported on elsewhere, recently provided extensions of records for two rather rare seaweeds; these two lines of inquiry raise the hope that further collaboration between botanists and ornithologists may be mutually profitable.

References:

Oliver, W. R. B. (1930): New Zealand Birds, Wellington, p. 209-210.
Witherby, H. F. et al. (1943): The Handbook of British Birds, London; Vol. IV., p. 17.

NOTES.

PARTIALLY ALBINO GOLDFINCH.—Albinism is reported fairly often among blackbirds, starlings and sparrows, but I have only once come across that state in the goldfinch. On June 4, 1950, among a flock of over 500 goldfinches seen near Masterton, was a bird wholly white except for yellow on the primaries (no yellow on the coverts) and black ends to the primaries and to the tail, the black markings showing up distinctly only when the bird was in flight. The yellow did not show in flight but was seen clearly when the bird perched in full view on a dead pine tree. The goldfinches were feeding on the green seeds of the small introduced nettle, an annual, which was growing profusely in this area.—R. H. D. Stidolph, Masterton.

SPARROWS DRINKING NECTAR.—On December 28, 1949, I observed nine sparrows through a pair of binoculars drinking nectar from pohutukawa (Metrosideros excelsa) flowers with evident relish. I had suspected this for some time, as flocks of sparrows had flown out of flowering pohutukawas from time to time on my approach in this vicinity. Dr. R. A. Falla informs me that he has seen sparrows drinking nectar from pohutukawa blossoms in the Auckland district some years ago. Mr. D. H. Brathwaite also observed sparrows doing likewise at Miramar, Wellington, about the same time as I did.—F. E. Wilkin, Wellington.

MAGPIE CARRYING OFF UNFLEDGED SPARROW.—About the middle of November, 1949, in Lindsay Road, Levin, a magpie flew across the front of my car, carrying an unfledged sparrow in its bill. It was followed by about 40 sparrows. The magpie flew under a thick barberry hedge and the sparrows alighted on the hedge, chirruping loudly.—A. A. Savell, Levin. NOTES ON MAGPIES.—The following observations were made by Mr. W. J. Barr and the pupils of the Fairton School, Canterbury:— October, 1948: The pupils had a young magpie in captivity. On at least two occasions when the young bird was placed on top of a pole 6 to 7 feet high a parent bird (thought probably to be the male) succeeded in transferring food (believed to be a worm) to the young bird while in full flight. Spring, 1949: Observation of magpies' nest; three young birds. Two were left in the nest and one kept in captivity in a box with wire netting. (One from the nest was later lost.) When the box was put out on the lawn the male parent bird, invariably, as far as was observed, fed the one in captivity while the female fed the one remaining in the nest.—S. A. La Roche, Christchurch.

HARRIER ATTACKING GREY DUCK .- One year on May 12, as I rounded a bend in the Punui River I discovered a grey duck escorting her family of downy youngsters foraging for food in a backwater. This was late in the year for a family and as I paused to watch a harrier swept overhead. The duck immediately commenced fluttering about, churning the water and quacking loudly. In spite of this attempt at diversion, however, the harrier twice struck, but on each occasion the duckling concerned dived neatly and reappeared a few yards away. In striking, the momentum of each stoop caused the harrier to half submerge its own body. The duck was now well-nigh frantic with concern for her family and had no thought for her own safety, consequently in making her the object of his third stoop, the harrier found her an easy target. Exerting every atom of strength, his broad wings bending beneath the strain, the harrier managed to lift her clear of the water and on to the bank. Grasping his victim, the raider gazed around to make sure the coast was clear—a precaution almost invariably taken by birds of prey before commencing to eat, but that brief interval gave the bewildered duck her only opportunity. With a sudden effort, which put the harrier completely off balance, she rolled over, down the bank, and she was in the water before the surprised harrier had left the ground. Even then, however, she did not consider her own safety, for she could easily have flown away. Instead, she called her frightened family around her and disappeared with them under some vegetation which overhung the bank before the raider could launch another attack .-- S. D. Potter, Auckland.

CORRESPONDENCE. SHINING CUCKOO.

(To the Editor.)

Sir,—Your number of April contained a description of a communal display of the shining cuckoo by Messrs. J. S. Watson and P. C. Bull and attributes it to some form of courtship.

My reading is that it may have been a gathering of cuckoos preparatory to migration, but that theory is weakened by the date, December 14, as migration would not take place till months later. I have seen a number of cuckoos doing the same while calling vigorously, waving their wings at the same time (rather than "flicking").

When I was at Waikaremoana in April, 1934, Mr. George Ormond told me a rather interesting story. During March or April (he was not sure of the exact date), a large number of shining cuckoos were gathered round the lake. An old Maori, who had gone up with him from Wairoa, put a kit with some fat in it in the bush and finally caught a cuckoo by pulling a string when the cuckoo was inside. Then he arranged a twig with the bird as a decoy on the bow beneath. As the decoy called the cuckoos came out of the bush and sat on the twig above the decoy in great numbers. He was concealed close to the decoy and knocked them down with a switch as they sat on the twig. He killed about 250 to 300 in this manner. Mr. Guy Ormond, Mr. George Ormond's son, who was with his father at the time, told me the same story exactly. He told it



SOUTHERN ROYAL ALBATROSS.—A nesting pair at Campbell Island showing sexual dimorphism (male on right).



Photos. 1943 by C. A. Fleming. A "GAM" OF IMMATURE SOUTHERN ROYAL ALBATROSSES, Campbell Island.

to me without knowing his father had described it to me and the accounts agreed. The cuckoos must have been gathered together in such numbers preparatory to their migration.

Killing birds with a stick from a concealed perch alongside a decoy bird was an old Maori method of killing kakas, so the story is in keeping with their methods.—I am, etc., Robert A. Wilson. Bulls, 16/4/50.

REVIEWS.

Trapping Methods for Bird Ringers, by P. A. D. Hollom, British Trust for Ornithology Field Guide Number one, 1950. Price, 2s. 6d.

This excellent publication of 40 pages contains details of all types of traps likely to be used by those ringing birds. Measurements and clearly set out diagrams of the various types of traps—automatic, nonautomatic and nets—should enable any of them to be made without trouble. Disadvantages, if any, and the precautions to observe with certain types are mentioned and an indication is given of the most suitable kinds of bait. In a preface, Dr. A. Landsborough Thomson, chairman of the Bird-Ringing Committee of the British Trust for Ornithology, emphasises that trapping "must not involve injury of any kind to the birds" and that in the preparation of the pamphlet "care has been taken to exclude methods likely to be harmful." These standards will be endorsed heartily by bird workers in New Zealand and those in this country who wish to take up ringing cannot afford to be without a copy of this pamphlet. Copies of the guide may be obtained from the British Trust for Ornithology, 91 Bambury Road, Oxford, England.—R.H.D.S.

The Royal Albatross, by J. H. Sorensen. Cape Expedition, Scientific Results of the New Zealand Subantarctic Expedition, 1941-45. Cape Expedition Series, Bulletin No. 2 (39 pp. 1 map, 8 tables and graphs; published by the Dept. of Scientific and Industrial Research, Wellington. Price, 4s., post free).

This publication is the first official ornithological result of the wartime occupation of the Subantarctic islands by coast-watching parties which included several naturalists among their numbers. Its author, already well-known for his popular articles in "The New Zealand Listener," spent parts of four years at Campbell Island between 1942 and 1946, and selected for special study the southern royal albatross (Diomedea epomophora epomophora). His results supplement the pioneer work of Richdale on the northern royal albatross (D. e. sanfordi).

The annual breeding royal albatross population of Campbell Island (area 42 sq. m.) is put conservatively at 5,000 pairs, locally concentrated to a density of 10 pairs per acre and 2,000 chicks are estimated to leave the island each year. Grazing sheep cause little trouble; the greatest mortality (approximately 50%) is due to attacks of skuas during the first week after hatching.

An interesting phenomenon which could hardly occur in small breeding colonies is the gathering of 'gams'' or groups or immature and unemployed adult birds for social intercourse, which follows courtship behaviour patterns, throughout the breeding season. ''Gam'' is defined by Webster as ''social intercourse between persons ashore,'' and the usage dates back to the times of the whalers, for whom a ''gam'' was also a visit between ships at sea.

A section is devoted to "walking and flight" and another to "sexual dimorphism." As in the northern race, males are larger, but sexual plumage differences (slight in **sanfordi**) are pronounced. Immature birds and young females resemble adult **sanfordi** but they can usually be sexed by the number of brown feathers on the crown. There is no direct statement on the colour of the tips of rectrices in young.

An account of the life history begins with a section on courtship and nest-building. Laying reaches a peak in the first week of December (as compared with mid-November at Otago Heads) and incubation occupies 79 days. Chicks are fed irregularly on fish and squid until they may attain a maximum weight of 32.51b. (adults weigh about 201b.). Sorensen confirms the absence of a fasting period before the young fly. Adult body-moult is suspected during a few weeks before and after the egg hatches.

Growth of the chick during the 35 to 38 weeks spent in the nest is described week by week and the history of a restricted colony, in which every bird was ringed and each nest pegged, is followed from 1943 to 1946. These few pages are the result of many long hours of careful observation and recording in weather that was usually bad. None of the 390 young ringed on the island was recovered in later seasons.

The patience and conscientious industry of this investigation into the biology of our most noble seabird in its bleak environment must earn the admiration of all fellow students of oceanic bird life. The bulletin is easy to read, but there are a few awkward passages (e.g. the opening sentence under "Unusual Behaviour") which suggest uncritical editing. Photographs are excellent, reproduction adequate; reproduction of graphs in half-tone seems unnecessary. The bibliographic reference (from cover, as quoted above in full) could well have been simpler and less redundant. Lack of a title page (with publication date and reference) between cover and contents raises problems for librarians planning to bind the series. Such faults can be remedied in the future bulletins necessary to record four years of sub-antarctic nature studies.—C.A.F.

SCIENTIFIC NAMES.

The scientific names of birds in this issue, where not given in the text, are:---

Bell-bird (Anthornis melanura). Blackbird (Turdus merula). Creeper, Brown (Finschia novaeseelandiae). Cuckoo, Shining (Chalcites lucidus). Dotterel, Banded (Charadrius bicinctus). Dotterel, N.Z. (Pluviorhynchus obscurus). Duck, Grey (Anas poicilorhyncha). Fantail (Rhipidura fuliginosa). Goldfinch (Carduelis carduelis). Harrier (Circus approximans). Huia (Heteralocha acutirostris). Kaka (Nestor meridionalis). Magpie (Gymnorhina sp.). Pheasant (Phasianus colchicus). Pigeon, Wood (Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae). Rifleman (Acanthisitta chloris) Robin (Miro australis). Silver-eye (Zosterops lateralis). Skua, Southern (Catharacta skua lonnbergi). Sparrow (Passer domesticus). Starling (Sturnus vulgaris). Thrush, North Island (Turnagra tanagra). Thrush, Song (Turdus ericetorum). Tomtit, South Island (Petroica m. macrocephala). Tui (Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae). Warbler, Grey (Pseudogerygone igata),

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