

SHORT NOTES

ADAPTABLE OYSTERCATCHERS

On 12 January 1983 I visited the shellbanks in the middle of Whangapoua Harbour, Coromandel Peninsula. The main bank is about 500 m long by 5 m wide at high water and is composed of loose cockle shells. It runs north to south. On the northwestern side are several juvenile mangroves (*Avicennia resinifera*) each covering about a metre of shell and on average 250 mm high.

On approaching the bank I noticed two pairs of Variable Oystercatchers (*Haematopus unicolor*) acting as if nesting. I searched the open shellbank without success but on inspecting the mangroves found first one nest and then a second, in separate mangrove clumps about 100 m apart. Both were just inside the perimeter of the mangrove bush, open to the sky, and had a clutch of two. This is the first time that I have seen oystercatchers nesting among living vegetation and wonder if the disturbance caused by holidaymakers and their dogs tramping over the shell and destroying nests has caused this habit. The plight of breeding oystercatchers on the Coromandel Peninsula's popular beaches was well described by the late Alan Jones in *Notornis* 26 (1): 47-52.

D. M. WALTER, *Pukehau Farm, Nolan Road, R.D. 2, Tuakau*



YELLOW BELLBIRDS

In early September 1984, Ken Wright, a forest ranger with New Zealand Forest Service, told me of yellow birds seen in Golden Downs State Forest. Three yellow birds had been seen by a group of workers constructing a track through a 15 ha remnant of hard beech (*Nothofagus truncata*) which is surrounded by exotic forests. I visited the area and saw one Bellbird (*Anthornis melanura*) which closely resembled a canary in colouring. The body was uniform pale yellow with the tail, undertail coverts, primaries and secondaries white. The head and throat were paler than the body, contrasting with a dark brown eye. The pale yellow gape stripe characteristic of female Bellbirds would be indistinguishable in this colour form. The legs were pale pink and the bill also lacked the normal intensity of colour. The bird was seen to associate with others and it appeared normal in song and feeding behaviour. Colour variations of the Bellbird are mentioned briefly by Oliver (1955, *New Zealand birds*, Reed), and although each of the four specimens he described had aberrant white or yellow plumage, none was as vividly or completely coloured as this bird. One of the three birds was apparently a more brilliant yellow than the one described here.

P. D. GAZE, *Ecology Division, DSIR, Private Bag, Nelson*