

MOREPORK CALLING FREQUENCY IN NELSON

Moreporks (*Ninox novaeseelandiae novaeseelandiae*) are present around home gardens in suburban Nelson. Records of their nightly calling frequency were made from my Nelson home from 14 April to 31 August 1975 and 1 January to 31 December 1976 (17 months). I listened each night from 2100 to 2300 hours NZST for calling Moreporks. The maximum number calling at any one time during the two hour listening period was recorded.

My study area (c. 1 km²) stretched across the mouth of the Maitai Valley and contained four Moreporks, apparently two pairs, one on each side of the valley. Farmland on the south side of the valley contained two large *Eucalyptus* groves, several *Pinus radiata* shelter belts and two areas of *Leptospermum scoparium* (manuka). The north side contained the Botanical Reserve, a remnant area of native hardwoods and podocarp mixed with mature introduced trees, such as *Quercus* (oak) and *Tilia* (lime).

Calling began at dusk and was recorded at all hours of the night until dawn. The *more-pork* call was heard throughout the year. The *cree* call was heard in August, September, November, December, February and April. Subadult calls were heard in July 1975 and June 1976 on the north side of the valley.

Calling frequency results are summarised in Figures 1 and 2. In 1975 calling was at a peak in April, was lowest in July, and another increase occurred in August. In 1976 calling again peaked in April, generally declined to its lowest in July and October and a smaller peak occurred in August. On nights when Moreporks were heard, the average number calling at one time varied from 1.0 to 2.5 birds (Figure 2).

An analysis of weather conditions (Table 1) shows that Moreporks called most frequently on clear and overcast nights. Birds called rarely on rainy and frosty nights.

Fleay (1968) described the calls and ecology of Moreporks in Australia. Some of his facts may aid in the interpretation of the data. He found that male calls were shorter and clearer than female calls, which were hoarse and in a lower key. Also, he described the *cree* call as a mate contact call given during the breeding season. He

TABLE 1 — Weather conditions and calling frequency.

Weather conditions	Total number of nights birds heard calling	Total number of nights birds not heard calling
Raining	7 (8.5%)	75 (91.5%)
Overcast	21 (50.0%)	21 (50.0%)
Clear	145 (43.3%)	190 (56.7%)
Frost	8 (12.5%)	56 (87.5%)

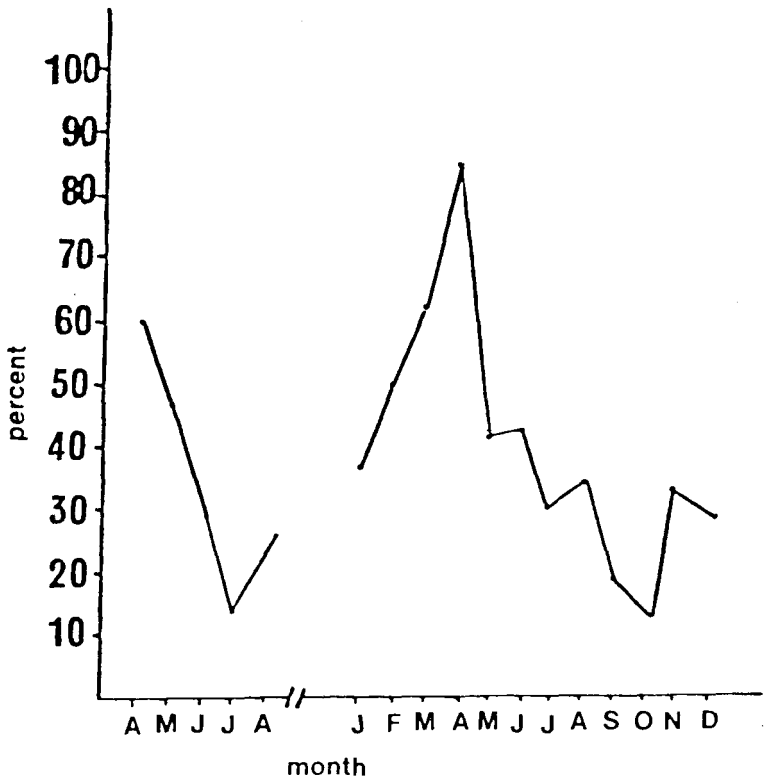


FIGURE 1 — Number of nights per month birds heard calling (percent).

found that pair bonds were formed in about August and that subadult calls were heard when young were 5-6 months old. He stated that Moreporks remain on their roosts in poor weather, and that during incubation, the female remains on the eggs almost constantly and probably only the male calls.

In this study, the highest calling frequency was during the time that young were still dependent but off the nest, and the lowest frequency during the incubation and nestling rearing stages of the breeding cycle. The nine months over which *cree* calls were heard may indicate that the pair bond was maintained from August to April.

The development of song in young birds, the August mating period, the increased mobility of birds and poor weather in winter, male territoriality, and female silence when breeding may all influence the annual calling pattern.

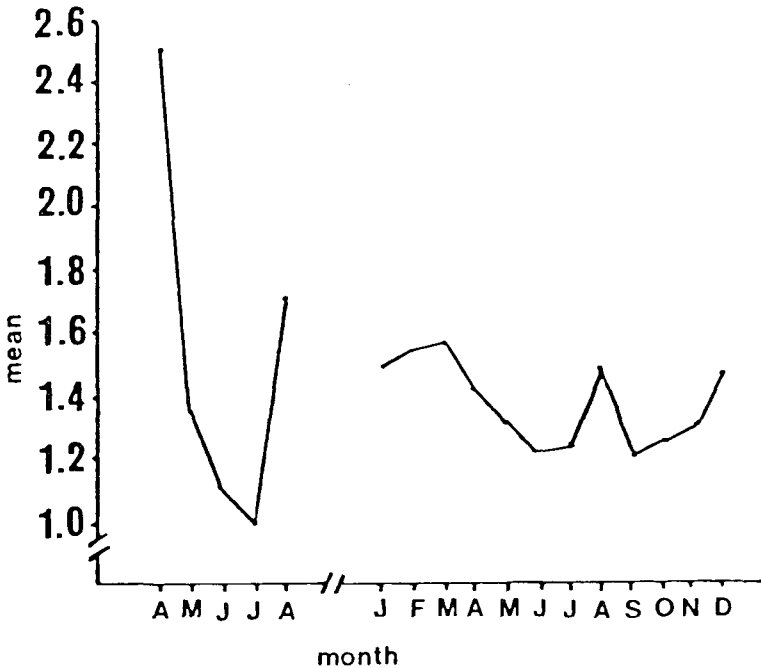


FIGURE 2 — Mean number of birds heard calling at one time per night, not including nights when no birds were recorded.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Barrie Heather and Ralph Powlesland for their very useful comments on this manuscript.

LITERATURE CITED

FLEAY, D. 1968. Nightwatchman of bush and plain. Australian owls and owl-like birds Brisbane: Jacaranda Press.

COLIN F. J. O'DONNELL, 198 Blenheim Road, Christchurch 4

★

THE FEEDING OF CAPTIVE NEW ZEALAND PIGEONS

On two occasions recently I have had a New Zealand Pigeon (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) brought to me to look after. The first was an adult that had collided with power lines. It was a shy bird and would feed only in the darkness of a large closed carton, enjoying poor-quality grapes and the coprosma berries that were plentiful at the time. It recovered fully after almost 3 weeks of care.

The second bird, which was seen to land on the roadside but could not fly away, still had two downy filaments on most of its back