

LETTER

The Editor,
Sir,

DUCK NUMBERS IN PROTECTED AREAS DURING SHOOTING SEASONS

It is a pity that Janet Smith in her discussion "Variations in duck numbers at Christchurch during the 1967 New Zealand shooting season" (*Notornis* 19 (1): 36-41, 1972) implies that the increase and subsequent decrease is due to disturbance of the birds at Lake Ellesmere during the shooting season and the activities of shooters there in the preceding three weeks.

This may well be so: but I see no evidence in the paper to support it and it is admitted that no study was made before the shooters' disturbance began, nor were the numbers of ducks on Lake Ellesmere counted before, during or after the shooting season. It is scientifically unwise to make such implications as she does in the absence of this data. Her advisers would have been wise to devise a control count in an area of little shooting pressure — if such exists — to see if ducks behave similarly or not.

I do not suggest the following is true but on the facts presented it is just as feasible (other evidence being ignored in this case). Perhaps the ducks have a post-breeding and post-moult tendency to congregate on the larger waters and this happens to coincide with the commencement of the shooting season — or more likely the shooting season is designed to coincide with this flocking tendency. Perhaps the food situation then becomes critical so that more and more birds are forced to smaller lakes and ponds — which happen to be protected. Perhaps in turn the food supply on these smaller areas becomes even more critical and the birds move out again — happening to coincide with the end of the shooting season.

I offer the above not as a serious theory but merely to impress on readers the danger of jumping to conclusions or accepting the apparently obvious explanation without making any attempt to prove it. I suggest that Janet Smith turns her undoubted reasoning ability to the study of more adequate data.

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