

This year the N.Z. Ecological Society is holding its annual conference in Invercargill from 22 to 25 August. The main business will be a symposium entitled: "Ecology and management of South Island Beech Forests."

Further details are obtainable from the Secretary, N.Z. Ecological Society, P.O. Box 1887, Wellington. The Royal Society's ad hoc committee intends to complete its work after the holding of this symposium but, meanwhile, any help from members of the OSNZ will be greatly appreciated.

A DUCK RETURNS

A "mystery" duck shot recently in Hawkes Bay has now been revealed as an Australian White-eyed Duck or Hardhead, *Aythya australis*. A contemporary newspaper report reads — "The 'extinct' duck which reappeared recently in Hawke's Bay probably flew in from Australia, said the National Museum's curator of birds (Mr F. Kinsky) today. The museum had definitely identified the unusual bird shot in Hawke's Bay on May 5 as a karakahia or white-eyed duck, said Mr Kinsky. The bird had been seen in New Zealand previously in 1895 and the last known sighting was one duck in 1934. 'The sightings have probably always been stragglers from Australia,' he said. 'The species has never bred here. Small flocks probably fly, or are blown, across the Tasman from time to time, but are not seen or not reported. They are quite common in Australia. There are at the moment rare stragglers in New Zealand. If a small flock settles here and starts to breed, we'll have a new bird.'"

An illustrated guide on "How to recognise the Hardhead" can be found on pp. 14-15 of *Australian Waterfowl* by Downes & Watson (1960) and New Zealand observers may be glad of its help while watching for further sightings of this interesting duck.

Source and Reference: 'Extinct' duck probably flew in from Australia. *The Evening Post* [Wellington], 31 May 1973, p. 6; DOWNES, M. C. & WATSON, I. 1960. *Australian Waterfowl*. 48 pp., illus. Melbourne: Fisheries and Wild Life Department, Victoria, and ICI of Australia & N.Z. Ltd.

BIRDS AND THEIR SONGS

Mr Les McPherson, of Christchurch, is becoming well known in the pages of *Notornis* as a maker and purveyor of sound recordings of bird song. A writer, John Collins, in *The Press*, the Christchurch morning newspaper, recently had this to say about him:

"Birds play an important part in Mr L. McPherson's life. In his job he packs ladies' lingerie and whenever he has the chance he tries to get a glimpse of even finer plumage. Mr McPherson, of Sherborne Street, has been an ornithologist since the age of 12, and he is now in his third year of tape-recording their calls. He has just had released his fourth commercially-produced record, which, he said in Christchurch yesterday, was selling briskly to both birdwatching clubs and schools. He has developed his own identification library

of world birds and has a wide collection of commercial recordings from all over the world. His own recordings had sold internationally, Mr McPherson said, including a full set to the B.B.C.'s library of natural history. Of particular interest to overseas enthusiasts were the calls of common local birds such as the blackbird and sparrow. They wanted to see if separation had led to a different call. Mr McPherson thinks it definitely has. Had they developed Kiwi accents? "More than that, they have regional dialects. If I played a recording of a Whangarei bellbird to a Southlander he'd scarcely recognise it." Mr McPherson has travelled all over New Zealand and to the mutton-bird islands to listen to the birds. His career nearly had a premature ending at the bottom of a 200-foot cliff on Bank's Peninsula, but this he dismisses as one of the occupational risks of recording spotted shags. He would like to make a living with his recordings, but thinks that this is not yet possible. "I'd probably have to branch out into insects and animals, eventually," he said."

Source: COLLINS, J. 1973. A call of the wild. *The Press*, 19 May 1973, p. 1.