FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

THE GREAT ART O' LETTER WRITIN'

" Give 'im a letter — can't do no better " so wrote Rudyard Kipling. The privilege, for want of a better word, of submitting " Letters to the Editor " is a tradition long-honoured in the world of journalism and in other literary circles. *Notornis,* over the years, has published a variety of letters, some critical, some informative, a few emotional or querulous, but none libellous or defamatory. It would be a pity indeed if any reader took umbrage at the provocation afforded by Dr Bourne's somewhat lengthy, but nonetheless pointed, attempt to awaken us. On the other hand, I was unamused to be admonished by a fellow member for publishing " that silly letter which [he] never expected to see (dis)gracing the pages of *Notornis,"* referring to the perfectly legitimate protest made by Mr F. N. Hayes in the December *Notornis.* It seems to me time the Editor himself had a say.

Habitually, an Editor refers a letter received to the instigator of the matter in hand if a reply seems appropriate. Regrettably, on the last few occasions on which I have done this, the said instigator has cautioned me that publication of the letter would serve no useful purpose, perhaps only revealing the ignorance and/or lack of perspicuity of its author: typical remarks — " My obvious advice, therefore, is to take no notice of his letter. . . . We don't want to publish more rubbish and reveal our uncritical ignorance." I firmly believe, however, that every member of the OSNZ has a right to be heard or, more precisely, to be seen in print. There is, all the same, a time for the Editor to close correspondence on a particular topic and I will not hesitate to do this when appropriate. Accordingly, we will continue to maintain the democratic right of readers to write to their editor but the basic canons of good journalism will still prevail — nothing libellous, seditious or any more than slightly irrelevant. Longwindedness will not be encouraged although even verbosity has its place.

The Editor reserves the right to refuse or reject any letter or request modification or emendation. " Letters " are, of course, subject to the " Instructions for Authors " and may be refereed in the usual way. Readers will be allowed to have their say but all members may be assured that the Editor has no intention of letting his correspondence column become tedious, repetitious or wasteful of space. Letters based solely on emotive expression or matters of opinion will not be received so kindly as those furthering the aims and objects of the Society and its journal.

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WHAT DO WE READ ?

As an Editor of a journal that is not necessarily intended for reading right through at one sitting, I am never unduly distressed when someone tells me he hasn't read his *Notornis;* only when I hear of some members of the OSNZ throwing their copies away unopened,

do I become worried. But not for myself nor for the hours that authors, editor, referees and printer have spent putting the journal together — rather for those members themselves who have missed out in sharing some of the pleasures of ornithology. Why do they join the Society? That is another question, and one that Regional Representatives might be able to answer.

There used to be a saying at one of the universities I attended that one either read books or wrote them. Some of to-day's manuscripts from particular "schools" of scientific research reflect this belief. Little seems to have been done of significance outside that particular laboratory or department. Dr Bourne's letter in this issue may remind us that to read *Notornis* only is not enough. There are many bird journals now available to us in New Zealand libraries, especially in our own OSNZ collection; with the widespread facilities of interloan, photocopying and abstracting services, there is hardly any excuse for saying that we don't know of or can't get particular articles or books. Later this year I intend to show the depth of our own resources of ornithological periodical literature in New Zealand in an attempt to encourage the wider use of what material exists as well as to reveal the gaps in the pious hope that acquisitive (as they *all* should be) librarians will take the hint.

Let us not be parochial in our reading. *Emu, Ibis, Auk, Condor, Wilson Bulletin, British Birds, Bird Study* — these names we know and their contents we should know as well. There is much of interest in all of them. The species of birds they discuss may be foreign to us but methods and conclusions have universal meaning. Much successful ornithology in New Zealand was done as a direct copy of something already found profitable overseas and the perusal of bird literature from beyond our shores is still just as rewarding for those of us who lack originality or require inspiration.

Several members have offered to compile annual or more frequent lists of new articles and books dealing with ornithology and ancillary topics likely to be of use to New Zealand readers. This is a time-consuming job and more than your Editor has been prepared to do on his own. Many of the overseas ornithological journals already publish reviews of general and regional books on birds; some select articles with abstracts from other journals, and others (as in *The Emu*) give lists of titles of current contents. I would like to know if there is a demand for any such service for readers of *Notornis* — the offer to provide it is there and some of our colleagues are willing to devote their time to it. Please make your desires known. Above all, let us not be castigated by a Letter to the Editor in the 42nd year of *Notornis* that New Zealanders are anything but catholic in their reading.

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OYSTERCATCHERS UNDER EXAMINATION

Reading *Notornis* could be a step towards academic success as a few of our younger members may have found. Allan Baker's pioneer work on the genetics of New Zealand oystercatchers takes on a novel role in last year's university entrance scholarship paper sent to us for comment by the Chief Examiner in Biology who also happens to be a "long-standing" member of the OSNZ.

UNIVERSITIES ENTRANCE BOARD

ENTRANCE SCHOLARSHIPS EXAMINATION—1974

BIOLOGY

NOTE.—*Answer question* 1 *and any* THREE *others. All questions in section B carry equal marks.*

[Time allowed: Three hours]

Ten minutes extra allowed for reading this paper

SECTION A (Compulsory—34 marks)

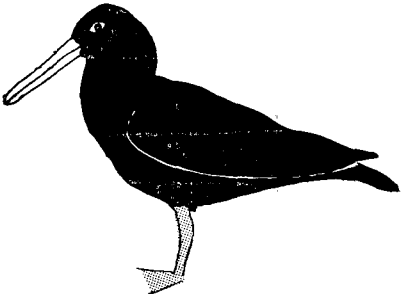
Answer all of the following section.

1. *Introductory Statement*

The information given below provides all of the facts which specifically concern New Zealand oystercatchers that are needed to answer this section. You will, of course, need to use your general biological knowledge to interpret the information provided.

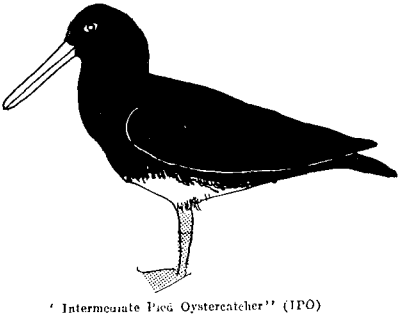
Background Information

New Zealand oystercatchers have become much more numerous since they were protected by law in 1940. Judging from the appearances of the birds there are four kinds of oystercatcher seen in the North and South Islands. These are illustrated below.



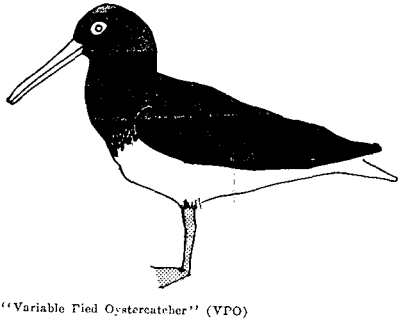
"Black Oystercatcher" (BO)

Distribution: In winter and summer throughout New Zealand on or near rocky shores where it feeds and breeds. Commonest in the south of the South Island. *Eggs laid*: Mid-October to mid-February.



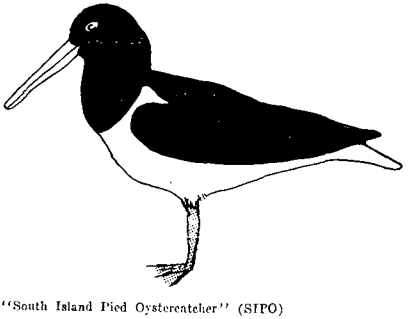
"Intermediate Pied Oystercatcher" (IPO)

Distribution: In winter and summer throughout New Zealand on or near rocky shores where it feeds and breeds. May tend to move onto sandy and muddy flats in summer in the far north. Commonest in north of North Island. *Eggs laid*: Mid-October to mid-February.



"Variable Pied Oystercatcher" (VPO)

Distribution: In winter and summer throughout New Zealand on or near rocky shores where it feeds and breeds. May tend to move onto sandy and muddy flats in summer in the far north. Commonest in north of North Island. *Eggs laid*: Mid October to mid-February.



"South Island Pied Oystercatcher" (SIPO)

Distribution: In winter on tidal sand and mud flats throughout New Zealand. In summer feeds and breeds at *inland* localities in the South Island. *Eggs laid*: Beginning of August to end of November.

TABLE 1. Winter distribution of BO, IPO and VPO according to latitude.

Latitude grouping	BO	IPO	VPO
34-39°S	43%	34%	23%
39-44°S	85%	8.5%	6.5%
44-48°S	94%	1.0%	5.0%

TABLE 2. Frequency of production of different kinds of progenies by matings of the different kinds of oystercatcher. (n = number of clutches observed.)

Parents		*Progeny*			
	n	BO	IPO	VPO	SIPO
BO x BO	10	20	---	--	—
BO x IPO	11	7	13	---	—
IPO x IPO	20	8	17	11	—
IPO x VPO	5	---	5	3	—
VPO x VPO	4	---	---	7	—
VPO x BO	7	---	17	---	---
SIPO x SIPO	243	-	---	--	435

TABLE 3. Observed and expected frequencies of 101 mating combinations. (Observations made in Northland.)

Mating Combination	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency if Mating Random†	χ^2 value
BO x BO	17	13.53	0.89*
VPO x VPO	7	6.56	0.03*
VPO x BO	14	18.78	1.22*
IPO x IPO	22	14.54	3.83*
BO x IPO	24	28.08	0.59*
VPO x IPO	17	19.39	0.29*

† Based on a census of phenotypes in Northland.

* χ^2 values marked with an asterisk indicate that the observed frequency is not statistically significantly different from the expected frequency.

TABLE 4. Occurrence of parasites in the different forms of oystercatcher.

Parasite	*Form of Oystercatcher*			
	BO	IPO	VPO	SIPO
Feather louse A	x	x	x	x
„ B	x	x	x	x
„ C	x	x	x	x
„ D	x	x	x	--
Intestinal fluke	x	x	x	x
Caecal fluke	x	x	x	x
Cloacal fluke	x	x	x	x
Tapeworm A	–	–	--	x
„ B	--	–	--	x
„ C	x	x	x	–
Roundworm	–	--	–	x
Spiny-headed worm	–	–	–	x

The first question is reproduced here for the benefit of any of our readers who might like to try their luck. Answers may be forwarded to the examiner c/o the editorial address, but there is no prize for a 100% pass !

QUESTIONS

Using the information supplied attempt the following questions.

A. How many *species* of oystercatcher do you consider are involved in the data presented here? Give reasons for your answer and indicate your estimate of the relative importance of the different pieces of evidence you use.

(8 marks)

B. Provide a genetical explanation of the data given in Table 2.

(8 marks)

C. Bearing in mind the data in Table 3 and the fact that some species of oystercatcher migrate, whilst other species do not, answer the following questions:

(i) Assuming that the breeding populations of oystercatcher species are large, do you consider it likely that the proportions of the different kinds of oystercatchers breeding in any locality will change markedly?

(ii) Give reasons for your answer to (i) above, and indicate the probable cause(s) of any change(s) you envisage.

(iii) Explain the relevance of the Hardy-Weinberg Principle to problems concerning the stability of gene frequencies.

(iv) What conditions must be met before this Principle can be applied? Are these conditions fully met in this case of the New Zealand oystercatchers? What further information, if any, do you need to answer this question?

(8 marks)

D. Briefly outline the alternative hypotheses which might be advanced to account for the data in Table 4.

(7 marks)

E. In practice the distinctions between BO, IPO and VPO are not always as clear-cut as the figures suggest, and intergrades may be found. In two or three sentences suggest a genetic mechanism(s) which could be responsible for this effect.

(3 marks)

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Readers may sympathise with the Editor who is struggling against much pressure from the North to resist using the expression "SIPO" in the pages of this journal. We now ought to consider the legitimacy, on the same basis, of IPOs, BOs and V[i?]POs in our Classified Summarised Notes. — Ed.