

## MEALY-TYPE REDPOLLS IN NORTHERN NEW ZEALAND

The very interesting paper (*Notornis* X, 61-67) in which David Stenhouse draws attention to the strong likelihood that two subspecies of Redpoll, Mealy (*Carduelis f. flammea*) and Lesser (*C. flammea cabaret*) have been established in New Zealand, probably for about a century, has prompted me to look back into my notebooks. Stenhouse's diagnosis is based on specimens obtained in the South Island, at Lincoln, Alexandra and Fiordland. It would appear that Redpolls showing strong 'Mealy' characters occur also in the North Island and may indeed be breeding north of 37°S. Lat.

On 29/8/48 Mr. H. R. McKenzie and I watched a small party of Redpolls feeding on the ground in a hollow behind the top of the beach at Kaiaua in the Firth of Thames. My note book says, "One male in fine plumage looked very pale, almost mealy!" We were looking down on the flock and I can still remember commenting on the paleness of its lower back which we were in a good position to see. H.R.McK's. notes significantly comment that "one was larger, scarlet-pink in front and generally lighter in colouring."

In late August and early September, 1962, when a study was being made of the natural history of the Mercury Islands, Redpolls were seen or heard daily about the camp at Peach Grove, Great Mercury. Often they fed on the ground. On September 6th a pair was closely watched under very favourable conditions by Mr. A. Blackburn and myself. The male was a strikingly beautiful bird with a rich rose-pink flush deepest on the breast; but there was an underlying paleness, and the lower flanks and belly were almost white. The main wing-bar was conspicuously whitish and the very pale edging to other wing-coverts left the impression of three white bars in the wing.

Soon after our return we consulted the Handbook of British Birds Vol. I, plate 8, and also 'The Birds of the British Isles,' Vol I, plates 18 and 19, by Bannerman and Lodge. The illustrations in both volumes confirmed our impression that the male we had watched on Great Mercury had such strong 'Mealy' characters that if not pure 'Mealy,' it must have been very nearly so. The female, too, in the contrast of tones in its plainer plumage, resembled rather the coloured figures of *flammea*, than of *cabaret*.

— R. B. SIBSON



## REVIEW

*Birds of the World*, by O. L. Austin Jr.; Illustrations by A. Singer. Golden Press, New York, 1961.

Since the end of World War II there has been something of a spate of large and colourful books on birds, reflecting presumably a growing interest in ornithology and in birds as things of beauty, whose existence is only too often threatened by what is rather dubiously called the advance of civilisation. The present volume with its superb illustrations would be an ornament to any library of fine books; and the technical skill of the artist and the quality of the reproduction cannot be too highly praised. The author has travelled widely, is a world authority on some species of terns, was co-author of a checklist on the Birds of Japan, and has visited New Zealand.

The text, which goes considerably farther than to be merely popular, is a valuable guide to the families of birds and their world distribution and is a veritable mine of varied information. Here, for instance, we may read, as we pass from the very large to the very small, that there is renewed hope for the survival of Steller's Albatross and that the Wrens of New Zealand are related to the Pittas or Jewel-thrushes. There are notes on longevity as proved by ringing. A Curlew has lived 32 years, a Herring Gull 28, an Arctic Tern 27, a Sooty Tern 25 and a Little Tern 23.

The author is very much concerned with the impact of man on wildlife and what he reports (pages 136 and 252) on the effects of the mass-spreading of insecticide sounds a grim warning.

Of special interest to New Zealand readers are maps of the migration routes of Arctic Tern, Giant Petrel and Tasmanian Mutton-bird, though that of the last-named gives a false impression of a general swing towards our long west coast before the real northward movement begins.

To find faults in such a lordly volume may seem churlish, but it is the duty of a reviewer to examine and judge the text in the light of what is said about the birds of his own country. In such a comprehensive work there is always the danger of trying to be too concise and some errors have crept in from over-simplification or compression. Other errors of fact are less venial.

Unfortunately there are only too many statements which in the interests of truth must be challenged. Among them are:

- p. 16 "Ostriches will fight when cornered and can be mean antagonists." Surely 'no mean' is meant.
- p. 29 The Yellow-eyed Penguin is said to "nest underground in burrows or rock crevices."
- p. 32 Buller's Albatross "is confined to New Zealand waters" — but only for breeding. What has happened to the South American records?
- p. 33 Once again in naming the largest of all sea-birds, the claims of the Royal Albatross of Campbell Island are overlooked.
- p. 35 The length of the Sooty Shearwater, given as 10 inches, is an obvious misprint, especially as on p. 36 the lengths of the prions are given as 11-12 inches.
- p. 46 "Gannets are cliff-breeders." This may be true of the St. Lawrence gannetries; but it is not generally true of British or New Zealand gannets.
- p. 81 We are told there are no Harriers in N.Z. — perhaps an echo of a once widely held belief that our common harrier is an introduced bird.
- p. 110 The Takahe is said to have been rediscovered "almost a hundred years after the last live bird was taken." But from 1898 to 1948 is only fifty years.
- p. 119 To say that the Wrybill "nests on the beaches of the South Island" is misleading. "Well inland on riverbeds" is nearer the truth. Does the Wrybill "migrate sometimes in flocks of up to 700 or more"? Since the middle 1940s flocks of 1500 or more have regularly occurred in their winter quarters; but no-one has seen large flocks actually migrating, and all the evidence points to a steady build-up from small parties. They

may travel south in larger flocks. At present the only districts where large flocks of 500+ are known are the northern termini of their migration. Six inches is an understatement for the length of a Wrybill.

- p. 216 When the author wrote that Swallows were absent from N.Z. it may have been true at the time; but in view of the very successful breeding, resulting in a 'population explosion' since 1958 in Northland, the statement is fortunately untrue; and an understandable error is readily forgiven.
- p. 227 The suggestion that Saddlebacks were especially associated with 'Kauri and tree-fern forests' is picturesque but quite inaccurate. The offshore islands, where this fine species survives and thrives, are hardly notable either for their Kauris or tree-ferns.
- p. 276 "Still to be found in some of the few patches of original forest now remaining" leaves the unhappy impression that the Bellbird is a threatened species just surviving, whereas over large areas it is very plentiful and over the whole country certainly outnumbers the Tui by a substantial margin; yet the Tui is said to be "still fairly common."

"Birds of the World" is a collector's piece, boldly conceived and superbly produced, but marred by textual inaccuracies which could have been avoided by a more careful study of local information, collected and published in the last decade. A useful bibliography fills two pages.

— R.B.S.

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## NOTICES

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### REGIONAL ORGANISERS, O.S.N.Z.

The list of Regional Organisers published in **Notornis** X, page 95, is amended as follows:—

AUCKLAND: D. F. Booth, P.O. Box 2522, Auckland, C.1 (change of address)

BAY OF PLENTY: H. D. London, P.O. Box 203, Whakatane (replaces Mrs. R. V. McIntock, left Bay of Plenty)

VOLCANIC PLATEAU (previously known as ROTORUA-TAUPO): C. D. Blomfield, cnr. Ariariterangi St. and Lake Road, Rotorua (replaces M. J. S. Black, resigned after 14 years of service to the Society)

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### PROPOSED MEMORIAL TO THE LATE JAMES PRICKETT

The North Shore Scenic Board has decided to erect a memorial in the form of a stone seat near the new entrance to Kauri Park, Birkenhead, in memory of the late Mr. Prickett.

O.S.N.Z. members in Auckland and South Auckland have been circulated, those who wish to contribute to the memorial being asked to forward contributions to: Mr. D. F. Booth, P.O. Box 2522, Auckland, C.1.

Many members in districts far from Auckland will have lively memories of the fine work and kindly personality of the late Mr. Prickett, and may wish to contribute to his memorial.