

LETTER

Sir,

In Mr. McAllum's detailed survey of Paradise Duck sex ratios (*Notornis*, March 1966, p. 85) he poses some questions which I think I can answer, or at least suggest where to seek answers. My own records entirely lack observations of "flocks" except at mid-summer when all birds are dwelling in harmony in crowds where chicks (i.e. those only a few months old) are in full plumage and where all adults are in full moult and flightless. I also have no knowledge of the age at which these birds pair or breed. The fact that all birds are in adult plumage well before six months old suggests that they should be in "breeding condition" as yearlings, though some doubt is cast on such an assumption by the fact that round about mid-winter, when hens are thinking about returning to their respective nesting grounds, they will go off prospecting with four, five or six males in attendance. In all probability the "extras" are last season's chicks (not necessarily all her own) who have not yet found a mate. There could well be one or two widowers among the attendants, too.

Mr. McAllum's figures showing sex records close to 50/50 from shooters' bags in May could relate to pairs already established in their nesting areas, where they would form part of a gunner's mixed bag.

A closer analysis of the data from which his tables are compiled might account for the discrepancies (31.5% males and 68.5% females) during November 1960 for four flocks totalling only 181 birds, and the proportions for Sept. and Nov. 1962. After all, there must be some valid explanation for figures which vary so markedly from the 50/50 conclusions drawn from 5435 birds observed during March and April as well as the grand total of 7490 birds.

Leg banding of flightless birds which can be sexed from colour of head (adults at mid-summer and chicks late October and early November) coupled with shooters' reports may, one day, give positive results. In the meantime I am personally pretty confident that averages over a wide area are very close to 50/50.

— MAURICE E. W. FITZGERALD

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Tauranga.

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NOTICE

KERMADECS EXPEDITION

Applications are invited to join the 1966 expedition to the Kermadec Islands, departing per H.M.N.Z.S. Endeavour about 10th November, and returning to N.Z. per H.M.N.Z.S. Inverell in mid-January. Applications should be made to A. T. Edgar, Inlet Road, Kerikeri, and applicants will be subject to selection by the Kermadec Expedition Sub-Committee.