

THE KERMADECS EXPEDITION 1966/67

Members of the Kermadecs Expedition returned to Auckland by HMNZS 'Kaiaia' on 29th January, 1967, all in good health and full of enthusiasm for the work they had been engaged upon, and well satisfied that they had made the most of their opportunities. Unstinted praise was expressed for the qualities of leadership and organising ability displayed by the leader of the Expedition, D. V. Merton, Senior Field Officer of Wildlife Division, and for his capable lieutenant, C. R. Veitch, also a Field Officer of Wildlife Division. We look forward keenly to the published results of their work, which consisted largely of breeding studies of many species of tropical seabirds which occur nowhere else in the New Zealand Subregion. Nothing is so far known of the breeding biologies of some of the birds which members of the party had under close observation for eleven weeks.

Since publication of the list of sponsoring members and donors published in 'Notornis' XI, pp. 192-3, the following amounts have come to hand and are gratefully acknowledged:

	£		£
Botany Division, D.S.I.R.	25	Nuttall, A., Oamaru	5
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— A.B.



LETTERS

FOODS OF THE PUKEKO

The article by A. L. K. Carroll (*Notornis* 13, 133) is interesting and informative in that it gives an account of foods taken over such a wide range of the habitats of the present day. It is to me rather remarkable that other foods, which could perhaps be classed as "fringe" foods, were not found. It appears that there have been some changes in diet since the time of Buller and the earlier years of this century. This could be due partly to changes of tastes in the birds and partly to modification of the habitat of earlier days. From 1909 to 1915 I lived at Wayby, North Auckland, where there were many large and small raupo (*Typha angustifolia*) swamps. Here the raupo was the main diet in the whole district. In the more shallow swamps the upper parts of the plant would litter the water, the lower part having been eaten as described by Buller. At that time there was little pasture available at Wayby and that very rough. The swamps were later drained and good pastures established. The Pukeko, whether because of this or some other reason then staged a population explosion and took to the foods of the open land. However, it is still surprising to me that in the Wildlife surveys no raupo was found in stomach contents. Some may have been present in macerated form, as provided for at the bottom of page 140, but it appears that it can be no longer a staple item even where it is still present.

The writer of the article, on page 133, apparently accepts the accounts by Buller and Oliver as to the diet of earlier times. Mention of some habits of the past which have carried through to the present, and some which have not, may be of interest. M. E. Fitzgerald (13, 222) has remarked on the taking of eggs. I have reliable evidence of this, too; and some evidence of the killing of ducklings. Other small birds may be taken if found at a disadvantage. At Mapiu, in the King Country, a Pukeko came out of a blackberry paddock and walked across the road, carrying a Blackbird (*T. merula*) which appeared to be alive. Probably both were feeding on the fruit and the Pukeko was eliminating competition. It looked as though it did not know what to do with the Blackbird which it most likely could not eat. At Waipu, Northland, the closing of part of the Waihoihoi Stream for protection of the Brown Teal (*Anas chlorotis*) has failed and local opinion has it that the upsurge of the Pukeko has been largely responsible. I would agree that this is extremely likely. The carnivorous habit has thus been maintained.

At Wayby in 1909-15 farmers grew their own potatoes and other vegetables to last for their own use for the year. Maize was also grown for home use in feeding pigs and poultry. The crops were grown in the best soil, often near a swamp. The Pukeko scratched out and ate potatoes, kumara and other root crops to quite a serious extent. Worse harm was done to standing maize. They would alight on a maize stalk, bend it down near the ground, open the sheath of the cob and pick off the grain. Also they would pull up and eat young maize plants. Another favourite food was the fruit of the blackberry, the seeds of which were evident in their droppings. Along old logs lying with the upper rotten surface just above water level I have seen hundreds of young blackberry plants. The logs were used as roosts and lookout places. The farmers did not like the random sowing of blackberry on their farms. These habits may have been modified because most farmers do not now have field gardens nor are blackberries so readily available. There will perhaps be other "fringe" foods which I have forgotten and some of which I have had no experience.

— H. R. McKENZIE



NOTICE

The Council of the South African Ornithological Society has decided to organise the

THIRD PAN-AFRICAN ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS in March, 1969

The Congress will be held in the Kruger National Park, by kind permission of the National Parks Board of Trustees, probably at Pretorius Kop.

Anyone interested in attending should notify —

The Hon. Secretary, S.A.O.S.,
C/o Percy Fitzpatrick Institute,
University of Cape Town,
Rondebosch, C.P., South Africa.

Further information will be sent as it becomes available.