

REPORT ON BEACH CONTROL SCHEME

Following discussion at the Society's last Annual General Meeting, Council decided to revive the Beach Patrol Scheme (See "Notornis" 8: 268). One thousand Specimen Record and five hundred Beach Patrol Cards have been printed at a total cost of £17/5/11, and a sheet of instructions has been prepared. So far 7 members have requested supplies of cards.

A preliminary analysis is being made of the results obtained before the previous supply of cards became exhausted, and it is proposed to submit a summary of this analysis for publication in "Notornis" later this year, and thereafter to publish annual progress reports. The existing collection of cards contains details of 2,557 birds, the numerically more important species being *Pachyptila salvini* (540), *Pachyptila turtur* (547), *Puffinus griseus* (280), *Pachyptila vittata* (194), *Puffinus gavia* (102), and *Eudyptula minor* (102). Thirty-one members contributed to the scheme; most of the 287 recorded patrols were made during the period 1951-54. The Organiser's thanks are due to Mr. B. W. Boesen, who has put in a great deal of time checking and tabulating the card collection.

P. C. BULL, Organiser



REVIEWS

A Treasury of New Zealand Bird Song (An album of three 45 extended-play records), by Kenneth and Jean Bigwood. Published by A. H. and A. W. Reed. 45/-.

Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Bigwood, bird-lovers may now sit quietly at home and hear the voices of eighteen native birds, including such rarities as Takahe and Kotuku — which can hardly be classed as songsters — and of twelve introduced birds, most of which are real singers. An imaginative commentary, with quotations from many sources and, surprisingly enough, notes on the edible qualities of some of the vocalists, is contributed by Gordon Williams, who has also written the text of an accompanying booklet. Thirty portraits are evidence enough of the photographic skill of Kenneth Bigwood.

Most of the recordings were made in the South Island and the tone quality is generally excellent. When the Keas are calling, the listener, by closing his eyes, may easily imagine that he is up near the snow-line in the Southern Alps; or when the Kakas are giving tongue, that he is back in the unravaged forest. It was a sound principle to put the calls of Kea and Kaka side by side, as the juxtaposition clearly brings out how different the calls of these two closely-related parrots are. This principle might well be carried further. Their voices confirm that the Pied and Yellow-breasted Tits are very close sub-species. But what of Whitehead and Yellowhead? Perhaps in due course it will be possible to hear in close succession the calls of these two puzzling birds; and also those of the North Island and South Island Robins, of Red-fronted and Yellow-crowned Parakeets, and — don't say it is too ambitious — of Cook's and Pycroft's Petrels. The Bigwoods are now in a position to prove local differences in the singing of the Bellbird.

Perhaps the most exciting of the sounds so far recorded are those of the Takahe. What effective off-stage noises they would be for a film of Conan Doyle's 'Lost World'! The ebullient outpourings of the Weka, too, should be included. These have been most admirably recorded. But why have the weird nocturnal noises of the Pukeko been omitted? The recordings of Pied Stilt and Banded Dotterel are disappointing and do not do justice to the variety of calls made by these two plovers.

Some of the comments may cause the critical listener to raise a doubting eyebrow. When Guthrie-Smith wrote about the Riro-riro's 'faint sweet trill that heralds fuller spring,' it may have sounded highly poetic; but it is nonsense to those who live in the north where the Riro-riro may be heard singing strongly both in the sticky noonday heat of February and in the cooler days when the autumn rains come. Faint? When conditions are favourable, it is audible at more than a quarter of a mile. How many Robins in the South Island now live where they can 'eat crabs from the seashore'?

It was a wise decision to include the songs of a dozen of the introduced birds; for among them are some of the best songsters in the world; and over large tracts of New Zealand now, it is their singing which dominates the dawn and dusk choruses. The recordings will be most helpful to those who claim that they cannot distinguish between the songs of Blackbird and Thrush; even if the recording has perhaps lost something of the Blackbird's fluty mellowness. Especially pleasing is the warbling of a Hedge-Sparrow against a background of chiming Bellbirds. The timbre of the finches comes through splendidly. Henceforward there can be no excuse for not recognising the distinctive trill of the Redpoll; a surprisingly common sound in some parts of New Zealand. After hearing these records, some will realise for the first time that the gay colouring of the Goldfinch is matched by the vibrant charm of its singing.

The Bigwoods have made a spectacular start in a new field of ornithology in New Zealand; but it is only a start; and much more remains to be done. Kokako, Brown Creeper, Rock Wren, Saddlebacks on Hen Island, Stitchbirds on Little Barrier all offer a challenge. Also waiting to be 'taped' are the sounds of the nesting colonies of our many sea-birds; the excited babel of islands where shearwaters and petrels come in at dusk; the feeding chatter of godwits and knots and the music of the tidal flats. The field, in fact, is almost inexhaustible.

The instructional value of these recordings is inestimable. They should be a stimulus to naturalists and others to travel with their ears open. The publishers are to be congratulated on their enterprise in making possible an original contribution to the 'literature' of New Zealand ornithology.

— R.B.S.



Checklist of Birds of the World, Volume IX, Edited by E. Mayr and J. C. Greenway, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Mass.

With the publication of Volume IX, the monumental Checklist of Birds of the World, which was initiated in the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Cambridge, Massachusetts, to replace Sharpe's obsolescent Handlist (1900-1910), moves one stage nearer completion. When the editor, J. L. Peters, died in 1952, only seven volumes of the planned fifteen had appeared. The task of completing the remaining volumes