

NOTES ON MAGPIES.—The following observations were made by Mr. W. J. Barr and the pupils of the Fairton School, Canterbury:—October, 1948: The pupils had a young magpie in captivity. On at least two occasions when the young bird was placed on top of a pole 6 to 7 feet high a parent bird (thought probably to be the male) succeeded in transferring food (believed to be a worm) to the young bird while in full flight. Spring, 1949: Observation of magpies' nest; three young birds. Two were left in the nest and one kept in captivity in a box with wire netting. (One from the nest was later lost.) When the box was put out on the lawn the male parent bird, invariably, as far as was observed, fed the one in captivity while the female fed the one remaining in the nest.—S. A. La Roche, Christchurch.

HARRIER ATTACKING GREY DUCK.—One year on May 12, as I rounded a bend in the Punui River I discovered a grey duck escorting her family of downy youngsters foraging for food in a backwater.. This was late in the year for a family and as I paused to watch a harrier swept overhead. The duck immediately commenced fluttering about, churning the water and quacking loudly. In spite of this attempt at diversion, however, the harrier twice struck, but on each occasion the duckling concerned dived neatly and reappeared a few yards away. In striking, the momentum of each stoop caused the harrier to half submerge its own body. The duck was now well-nigh frantic with concern for her family and had no thought for her own safety, consequently in making her the object of his third stoop, the harrier found her an easy target. Exerting every atom of strength, his broad wings bending beneath the strain, the harrier managed to lift her clear of the water and on to the bank. Grasping his victim, the raider gazed around to make sure the coast was clear—a precaution almost invariably taken by birds of prey before commencing to eat, but that brief interval gave the bewildered duck her only opportunity. With a sudden effort, which put the harrier completely off balance, she rolled over, down the bank, and she was in the water before the surprised harrier had left the ground. Even then, however, she did not consider her own safety, for she could easily have flown away. Instead, she called her frightened family around her and disappeared with them under some vegetation which overhung the bank before the raider could launch another attack.—S. D. Potter, Auckland.

CORRESPONDENCE.

SHINING CUCKOO.

(To the Editor.)

Sir,—Your number of April contained a description of a communal display of the shining cuckoo by Messrs. J. S. Watson and P. C. Bull and attributes it to some form of courtship.

My reading is that it may have been a gathering of cuckoos preparatory to migration, but that theory is weakened by the date, December 14, as migration would not take place till months later. I have seen a number of cuckoos doing the same while calling vigorously, waving their wings at the same time (rather than "flicking").

When I was at Waikaremoana in April, 1934, Mr. George Ormond told me a rather interesting story. During March or April (he was not sure of the exact date), a large number of shining cuckoos were gathered round the lake. An old Maori, who had gone up with him from Wairoa, put a kit with some fat in it in the bush and finally caught a cuckoo by pulling a string when the cuckoo was inside. Then he arranged a twig with the bird as a decoy on the bow beneath. As the decoy called the cuckoos came out of the bush and sat on the twig above the decoy in great numbers. He was concealed close to the decoy and knocked them down with a switch as they sat on the twig. He killed about 250 to 300 in this manner. Mr. Guy Ormond, Mr. George Ormond's son, who was with his father at the time, told me the same story exactly. He told it

to me without knowing his father had described it to me and the accounts agreed. The cuckoos must have been gathered together in such numbers preparatory to their migration.

Killing birds with a stick from a concealed perch alongside a decoy bird was an old Maori method of killing kakas, so the story is in keeping with their methods.—I am, etc., Robert A. Wilson. Bulls, 16/4/50.

REVIEWS.

Trapping Methods for Bird Ringers, by P. A. D. Hollom, British Trust for Ornithology Field Guide Number one, 1950. Price, 2s. 6d.

This excellent publication of 40 pages contains details of all types of traps likely to be used by those ringing birds. Measurements and clearly set out diagrams of the various types of traps—automatic, non-automatic and nets—should enable any of them to be made without trouble. Disadvantages, if any, and the precautions to observe with certain types are mentioned and an indication is given of the most suitable kinds of bait. In a preface, Dr. A. Landsborough Thomson, chairman of the Bird-Ringing Committee of the British Trust for Ornithology, emphasises that trapping “must not involve injury of any kind to the birds” and that in the preparation of the pamphlet “care has been taken to exclude methods likely to be harmful.” These standards will be endorsed heartily by bird workers in New Zealand and those in this country who wish to take up ringing cannot afford to be without a copy of this pamphlet. Copies of the guide may be obtained from the British Trust for Ornithology, 91 Bambury Road, Oxford, England.—R.H.D.S.

The Royal Albatross, by J. H. Sorensen. Cape Expedition, Scientific Results of the New Zealand Subantarctic Expedition, 1941-45. Cape Expedition Series, Bulletin No. 2 (39 pp. 1 map, 8 tables and graphs; published by the Dept. of Scientific and Industrial Research, Wellington. Price, 4s., post free).

This publication is the first official ornithological result of the wartime occupation of the Subantarctic islands by coast-watching parties which included several naturalists among their numbers. Its author, already well-known for his popular articles in “The New Zealand Listener,” spent parts of four years at Campbell Island between 1942 and 1946, and selected for special study the southern royal albatross (*Diomedea epomophora epomophora*). His results supplement the pioneer work of Richdale on the northern royal albatross (*D. e. sanfordi*).

The annual breeding royal albatross population of Campbell Island (area 42 sq. m.) is put conservatively at 5,000 pairs, locally concentrated to a density of 10 pairs per acre and 2,000 chicks are estimated to leave the island each year. Grazing sheep cause little trouble; the greatest mortality (approximately 50%) is due to attacks of skuas during the first week after hatching.

An interesting phenomenon which could hardly occur in small breeding colonies is the gathering of “gams” or groups of immature and unemployed adult birds for social intercourse, which follows courtship behaviour patterns, throughout the breeding season. “Gam” is defined by Webster as “social intercourse between persons ashore,” and the usage dates back to the times of the whalers, for whom a “gam” was also a visit between ships at sea.

A section is devoted to “walking and flight” and another to “sexual dimorphism.” As in the northern race, males are larger, but sexual plumage differences (slight in *sanfordi*) are pronounced. Immature birds and young females resemble adult *sanfordi* but they can usually be sexed by the number of brown feathers on the crown. There is no direct statement on the colour of the tips of rectrices in young.

An account of the life history begins with a section on courtship and nest-building. Laying reaches a peak in the first week of December (as compared with mid-November at Otago Heads) and incubation