kowhai in full bloom; occasionally seen and heard other times of year; 16/1/50, only one heard at McKennas Creek, 2m. Bellbird: Common in surrounding districts. Greenfinch: 17/7/49, several at McKennas Creek; 21/6/50, 1, and 25/6/50, several seen in town, also at Coal Creek, 5m. Chaffinch: Common. Goldfinch: 15/7/49, common near Orowaiti R.; 5/6/50, one in Buller Gorge. Yellowhammer: 15/7/49, fairly common near Orowaiti R. Song Thrush and Blackbird: Fairly common. Hedge Sparrow: Occasionally seen about the house. Skylark: 15/7/49, heard singing at Orowaiti R., where frequently to be seen and heard. Starling: Common at Orowaiti River; May, 1949, many large flocks seen coming upstream each evening before dusk. Amongst others the following birds have also been reported: Weka, blue duck, grey duck, rifleman, kaka, and possibly kiwi, also red-fronted parakeet. These have yet to be confirmed at first hand.—V. M. Readman, Westport.

WOOD PIGEONS EATING SHOOTS AND LEAVES.—At Te Araroa I was in the garden, about December 23, 1949, when a wood pigeon fluttered across and settled on the top of a slender Lawsoniana. In a few seconds it was joined by another, then another until there were five. They picked the little green shoots for a while, then one by one they came to an apple tree not more than six yards from where I sat on the grass. They made a real meal of apple leaves and didn't seem to bother about me at all, though they must have seen me. Their close proximity gave me an excellent opportunity of seeing their beautiful plumage. On another evening they came back and all five sat on the Lawsoniana bending down its slender top and swaying up and down, picking at the shoots.—M. M. Taylor, Gisborne.

IRRUPTION OF BLACK SWANS.—For the last two weeks (first two weeks in June) hundreds of black swans have frequented the Manukau Harbour, near the mouth of the Big Muddy Creek. The first day I saw six, second day 38, the third day 536 and since then the numbers have increased so much I find it impossible to count them through the telescope. During the years I have lived here I have never seen swans in this locality before.—Mrs. J. Howes, Laingholm, via New Lynn.

CORRESPONDENCE.

SHINING CUCKOO.

(To the Editor.)

Sir,—It was not my intention to reply to J. S. Watson and P. C. Bull's summing up of my observations (Forest and Bird, 55, 5, 1940) in your issue of April, 1950, but so many friends have written to me suggesting a reply I do so to please them.

From 1909 to 1924 my life was spent breaking in a block of native bush about 16 miles back from Opotiki, Bay of Plenty. Access to my section was by bridle track, six miles of which was through virgin bush, another two miles through newly felled and grassed bush land, with odd pieces of native bush, ideal breeding places for many birds, including the grey warbler and the shining cuckoo. My children and I knew our native birds intimately, including the blue wattled crow (and knew where to find its habitat) as well as seeing flocks of kakas and many a kaka's nest while I was felling bush, not to mention kererus, tuis and bellbirds in abundance. I had a piece of native bush reserved within fifty yards of my homestead with native trees and exotic hedges, together with one hundred fruit trees between this and my house, the whole making a splendid field for observation.

All those years I kept a yearly record of when the first shining cuckoo was seen (not heard)—the usual date was September (often heard earlier), occasionally early October, sufficient time for the cuckoo to lay her eggs and for the young to be hatched by late November. My wife and family all learned to recognise our native birds—the children used the term "pip pip" for the shining cuckoo, which, together with the long-tailed cuckoo, was a regular visitor. On at least one occasion a

shining cuckoo remained the whole winter in the bush reserve on my section. We all knew the screech of the grey warbler and what it meant —that a cuckoo was molesting it.

Not only did I find the eggs of shining cuckoos in the grey warblers' and fantails' nests, but my elder son did the same. Where there were many leaves below we frequently found a complete and unbroken egg of the grey warbler below a grey warbler's nest, showing that the shining cuckoo does not always destroy or eat the egg of the host, nor does it always tip all the grey warbler's eggs out of the nest. From the verandah of the house we have watched a grey warbler feeding a young cuckoo. My younger son's birthday is in November, and for years it was his birthday wish that I show him the egg or the young of a shining cuckoo in a grey warbler's nest, or in that of other birds.

Many times my three children and I would patiently watch a shining cuckoo perched above a grey warbler's nest, but though we waited long we did not witness the actual placing of the egg within the nest, though the cuckoo egg would be there next morning.

Just what the mention of Dr. Falla's information about the time when young cuckoos appear in Wellington has to do with my observations in the Bay of Plenty, I cannot imagine.

The colour, the size and the notes of young cuckoos are enough to distinguish the young from adults, surely—at least to one who had closely observed these birds, their eggs and their young over fifteen years alone. —I am, etc., DAVID H. GRAHAM, 28 White's Line East, Lower Hutt. August 14, 1950.

REVIEWS.

Some South-Pacific Sea-bird Logs, by C. A. Fleming. (Based on observations by R. A. Falla, C. A. Fleming and R. B. Sibson). Emu, Vol. 49, 1950, pp. 169-188, eight figures.

Written with the chief object of recording northward limits of southern sea-birds, this informative paper will be welcomed by ornithologists who may be making ocean voyages, especially as reprints are available, as long as the supply lasts, to intending travellers. Useful aids to identification are given, notably in the diagramatic sketches of some of the species encountered. After introductory matter, logs are included of five voyages on which the paper is based, and then follow a summary of the distribution limits of selected species and a discussion.—R.H.D.S.

The Opening of Milk Bottles by Birds.—James Fisher and R. A. Hinde, British Birds, XLII., pp. 347-357. (A publication of the British Trust for Ornithology.)

This paper records the result of an investigation in which 126 members of the Trust and many of the public took part, through the medium of a questionnaire, and is an admirable example of this method of inquiry. The habit of prising open the waxboard tops of milk bottles and drinking the milk was first observed near Southampton in 1921, and since then it has become widespread in England and some parts of Wales, Scotland and Ireland. A series of maps shows at a glance the spread of the habit, which seems to have arisen spontaneously in many areas, and which is then copied by other birds in the district. It may not develop in a district until several years after the introduction of bottled milk, and it is unknown in Holland, where metal foil stoppers are widely used: these, however, are also opened in England. It seems possible that birds learn of the association of food and bottles through leaky tops, but L.S.V.V. in "The Ibis" (Vol. 92, 2) suggests that the habit may have originated through birds pecking at the waxed covers for their fatty content. The habit has been observed mainly in blue and great tits, but it may become of particular interest in this country as it has also been recorded in small numbers in the house sparrow, blackbird, starling, robin (**Erithacus melophilus**), chaffinch, song thrush and hedge sparrow, all of which, with the exception of the robin, are found in New Zealand.—J.M.C.