

in either Berlin or Dresden, and one in the Dunedin Museum, I decided to write to the late Mr. Edgar Stead and tell him of my experience at Gear Arm in 1910. Actually, I did write a similar account of my experience as I've written here, but got the idea into my head that Mr. Stead may have thought I was romancing in view of the fact that such a long time had elapsed, and I had not reported it. The facts of the matter are that at the time I knew nothing about a notornis or that ever one existed. What I really thought I saw at Gear Arm was an outside in pukekos, and it was not until I saw the coloured plate in the book my friend gave me that I realised it was something totally different. Perhaps if we as children had been taught a little more about natural history in our schools we wouldn't have grown up so ignorant as to what this country contained in the way of bird life, etc."

INQUIRY INTO THE STATUS OF FAIRY TERN IN N.Z. INTERIM REPORT.

By Noelle Macdonald, Howick.

From over 120 questionnaires distributed to members regarding the inquiry into the status of the fairy tern (*Sterna nereis*) only 27 have been returned. These have come from all parts of the country, ranging from Stewart Island to Whangaroa, through many of the central areas of the two islands.

As far as can be judged at this stage, the fairy tern anywhere is rare, and numbers seem to have diminished in the South Island especially, where at the turn of the century this bird was comparatively plentiful. There are early records of the bird having been observed in such areas as the Rakaia River mouth and Lake Ellesmere, but recent records are mostly confined to the North Island, chiefly in the Pakiri-Mangawhai and Waipu-Ruakaka areas, though one or two birds have been observed at different times on the Kaipara, Manukau and Firth of Thames. Within the last twenty years the fairy tern has been observed at Tauranga, Manawatu, Blenheim and the Rangitikei River, and some eggs collected at Hawke's Bay are now in the Canterbury Museum; but no birds have been reported from these areas in recent years.

The only known present-day breeding ground appears to be on the sandhills just south of Mangawhai, where nests were recorded in the last twelve years. In 1951 a nest was reported to Mr. L. Wintle, who also found a fledgling that had just left the nest. In 1939, 1940 and 1941 nests were found and photographed by Dr. C. A. Fleming, Major G. A. Buddle and Mr. S. D. Potter. No other nest records have as yet come to hand, but this does not mean that the birds have not nested elsewhere. Further information in this respect is required.

Regarding population numbers, according to reports received so far, not more than six birds have been seen at any one time or place, except a very doubtful record of twenty at Stewart Island. Odd birds have been observed at various places in the North Island, but the fact that they have been recorded only once tends to show that they were probably birds of passage and not regular inhabitants.

One fact evident, even at this early stage of the inquiry, is the marked decrease of the fairy tern in New Zealand, and the extreme importance of preserving the remaining few. It is gratifying to learn that the Department of Internal Affairs has now declared the Mangawhai area—beach and sandhills—a sanctuary. Much of the credit for this goes to Mr. Wintle, who pressed the urgency of the matter with the Department.

Much more information is still required and if members have any knowledge whatsoever of the fairy tern in New Zealand would they please send it to the organiser of the inquiry, Miss N. Macdonald, Keppoch Lodge, Sale Street, Howick, Auckland. There may yet be other areas where this bird still breeds, and the importance of discovering these and taking the necessary preservation measures cannot be too strongly emphasised. Particularly important for further investigation by members are any areas of sandhills with a river or lake nearby. To those who have already helped with this inquiry sincere thanks are extended.