

THE VALUE OF BIRD WATCHING.

In the course of his presidential address at the last annual meeting of the society, Mr. R. B. Sibson stated:—"E. M. Nicholson, one of the founders of the British Trust for Ornithology, has remarked that ornithology is one of the few sciences which remains mostly in the hands of the amateur. This may be because of the intrinsic attractiveness of seeking and watching beautiful creatures. But it is certain that the bulk of the information on the status and distribution of our birds and their breeding behaviour in the field must be collected by those who watch them for the fun of the thing; for the simple reason that the professionals are few, and in a land such as ours, with its long coastline and difficult terrain, adequate coverage can only be attained and maintained by an active society of enthusiastic amateurs.

"It is clear, therefore, that this places a high responsibility on the ordinary observer. It should be his or her aim to be a critical ornithologist, satisfied with nothing but the truth, even though it may take a long time to reach it. This is very important when a rare or unknown bird is met for the first time. I would suggest that with the aid of the new Checklist all members should make a list of the birds which are known to occur in their districts and a list of those which may occur, especially if it is a coastal district with an estuary or lakes. I would further stress the need for teamwork and regular watching at all seasons and in all weathers. We in Auckland are undoubtedly well-placed with Manukau and Miranda, Muriwai and Horuhoru so to speak, on our doorstep; but it is only by persistence that not only has much been learnt about the breeding, movements and distribution of some of the commoner birds but also a remarkable number of rare visitors and Arctic migrants has been discovered. The 'lone wolf' can do most valuable work in a district, but when rarities appear it is his duty to make careful notes in the field and if possible, to call in other witnesses. I have always found the professionals in the museums and elsewhere most helpful. Only by the happy co-operation of both professional and amateur can ornithology in this country make any real progress.

"I am sometimes asked what is the point of all this bird-watching. My answer runs something like this. First of all, the collection of accurate information on New Zealand birds, with special reference to their breeding behaviour and requirements and to migration. Such information should be the basis of any sound programme of conservation. But apart from this, I believe that ornithology satisfies in a sublimated way—if I may borrow a phrase from the psychologists—man's old primitive instinct to hunt. Bow and arrow and gun have been superseded by telescope and camera. Ornithology appeals or should appeal also to man's aesthetic sense and help to satisfy his desire for beauty. It has a fascinating literature which opens up new vistas and fireside ornithology can be a profitable recreation. In short, bird-watching is not merely a science in the narrower sense. It is also a cultural activity which ought to make us into better and kinder human beings."

REGIONAL ORGANISERS.

The council has made the following further appointments:—

Otago.—Mr. Brian A. Ellis, 91 London Street, Dunedin, in place of Mrs. L. E. Walker, who has become South Island Vice-President.

For each of the following districts there has been no previous appointment under the new constitution:—

Wellington.—Mr. Kaj Westerskov, c/o Wildlife Section, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington. His region comprises the cities of Wellington and Lower Hutt, Upper Hutt, southward and westward to the coast (including Kapiti Island), northward to Waikanae and Mt. Hector, and eastward to the divide of the Rimutaka Ranges.

Northland.—Mr. D. G. McMillan, c/o District High School, Kawakawa. Mr. McMillan's boundaries have yet to be fixed.