

New Zealand Bird Notes

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Edited by R. H. D. STIDOLPH, 114 Cole Street, Masterton.

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CONTENTS.

	Page
Census of Gannets in N.Z., by K. A. Wodzicki & C. A. Fleming	17
Petrels Cast Ashore by August Gales, by E. G. Turbott & R. B. Sibson	19
Present Distribution of N.Z. Robins, by C. A. Fleming	24
Stilts Nesting at Ardmore, by A. F. Stokes	26
Breeding of Red-Billed Gull, by C. A. Fleming	27
Further Record of Pterodroma Leucoptera, by P. C. Bull	29
Spotted Shag near Auckland, by T. W. Cox, T. M. Roberts, E. G. Turbott and R. B. Sibson	30
About our Members	31
Reviews	32
NOTES.—Skuas Robbing Red-billed Gulls, 23; Dabchick Investigation, 23; Flying Shag Loses Balance, 25.	
Illustrations.—Brooding Red-billed Guil, 27; Burgess Island (map) 28.	

CENSUS OF GANNETS IN NEW ZEALAND.

A periodical census of species of birds is of great importance in providing information in respect of the biological status of a species, whether it is on the increase or decrease, or whether the prevailing conditions of protection are effective enough to preserve it. A census gives information on many problems which are related to ecology and the control of Wild Life.

There are few species of gregarious habits during the breeding season of which numbers can be reliably estimated. The Gannets, breeding year by year on small islands or rocks, sometimes for centuries, are birds of which the breeding population can be accurately estimated and its trends surveyed. James Fisher and H. G. Vevers (1939 and 1943), assisted by a team of British ornithologists, have recently made a census of the North Atlantic Gannet (*Sula bassana*) which breeds on rocky islands around the British Isles, Iceland and the eastern coast of Canada. Fisher and Vevers were able to obtain the trends of population in different gannetries and assessed the world population of this species in 1939 as 165,600 breeding adults.

An estimation of the population of the Australasian Gannet (*Sula serrator*) in Australia is being undertaken by

Mr. S. Fowler and Dr. D. L. Serventy, under the aegis of the Fisheries Department of the Australian C.S.I.R.

One of us, with Professor C. P. McMeekan, has recently made a census of the Cape Kidnappers gannetry and outlined the distribution of New Zealand gannetries and their estimated population, based mainly on figures supplied by Dr. R. A. Falla. Most estimates are, however, a dozen or more years old.

Known New Zealand gannetries are:—

NORTH ISLAND.

Three Kings (Princes Islets).	Oaia Island (off Muriwai Beach).
Poor Knights (Sugar Loaf)	Alderman and White Islands (Bay of Plenty).
Great Barrier (Mohuki Island)	
Coromandel Islets.	Gannet Island (off Kawhia).
Gannet Rock (Hauraki Gulf).	Cape Kidnappers.

SOUTH ISLAND.

Nugget Islets and Solander Island.

At the annual meeting of the Society on May 25th a gannet census in the 1946-47 breeding season was approved as a project and the organisation of a scheme was entrusted to the undersigned.

A gannet census presents difficulties; some of the gannetries are hard to get at and these may be tackled by using aerial photographs. However, other gannetries can be easily approached. It is possible that a small grant (e.g., covering the expenses of hiring a launch) may be available. Would members who live near New Zealand gannetries, or who may visit some this year and who may be able to collect the necessary information, write to one of us for an outline of the information which is desired?

Any information on past numbers and conditions at the breeding colonies, their protection or depredations, etc., will be acceptable.

Topics not directly related to the census—such as the occurrence of immature birds at sea, distance from nearest gannetry of birds at sea, etc.—can be embraced within the scope of the project.

K. A. WODZICKI.

C. A. FLEMING.

c/o Department of Scientific and Industrial Research,
Wellington.

REFERENCES.

Fisher, Jas. and Vevers, H. G.—(1943.) “The Breeding, Distribution, History and Population of the Atlantic Gannet (*Sula bassana*).” Parts I. and II. *Journal of Animal Ecology*, 12.2.pp. 173-213 and 13.1.pp. 49-62.

Wodzicki, K. A. and McMeekan, C. P.—(1946.) “The Gannet on Cape Kidnappers.” *Trans. R.S. of N.Z.* (in print).

GANNET CENSUS.—Members able to take an active part in the proposed gannet census may wish to read the reports of the 1939 Atlantic Gannet Census by Fisher and Vevers. A set of these papers will be available for loan, after binding, to such members. Applications for loan should be addressed to the Recorder, C. A. Fleming, 79 Duthie Street, Wellington, W.3.