

cile existing conditions with the scientific theories which tell us that all flightless birds of to-day were at one time or another, away back in the ancient times of their ancestors, possessed of full powers of flight; but no such difficulty exists in the case of the kakapo. Here we have a bird feathered in every detail like a bird of flight, the rounded full-sized tail, the large, well proportioned wings, the short thick legs, and heavy clawed feet, all tell us that such a bird was never created to work out its destiny on the floor of the forest. In fact, these outstanding features alone immediately force us to the conclusion that this bird was at one time a flyer, and leave us bewildered at the thought that to-day that power has passed. And why? Is it because this beautiful bird found no charm in opening its wings, and floating from tree to tree, from hilltop to hilltop, and that it preferred the heavy drudgery of the cold, inhospitable forest floor, to the gay life of the bird on the wing? All these things must remain unanswered, and we bow to the mighty powers of evolution that leave us pondering over the extraordinary mysteries of nature, whether they are of regeneration, or as in the case of the bird under notice, degeneration.—The Emu.

OPOSSUMS.

Whether opossums are enemies of bird life is a question not finally settled. A statement, based on experience, is made by Mr. E. S. Allen, of Waitara, in a letter to the "Taranaki Herald": "For many years at Frankleigh Park," he writes, "I bred opossums in a properly constructed house, and they would very quickly devour any bird that would occasionally get into their quarters. I have seen many a sparrow caught and eaten in very quick time, also any birds' eggs were a very great treat, and greatly appreciated by these nocturnal animals."

SEA BIRDS AND OIL.

A special conference of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds was held yesterday at the British Empire Exhibition, under the presidency of the Duchess of Portland. A number of Dominion representatives were present.

The Duchess of Portland, who apologised for arriving late, explained that she had never been to Wembley before, and had no idea of the vastness of the Exhibition. Her bath-chair, she added, had got into several difficulties on its way to the conference hall. Referring

to the need for legislation to secure effective protection for birds, she said they must, as individuals and societies, be unwearied in their propaganda to create and foster an enlightened public opinion. The destruction of sea birds by oil was a matter of great importance and urgency. On the East Coast she saw many of the gulls and guillemots clinging to the rocks. She had caught one and tried to wash the oil off, but it was no good, and the most merciful thing was to knock it on the head. In one short period 200 pink-footed geese perished on the south side of the Humber from this cause.

Field-Marshal Lord Methuen moved a resolution approving the progress already made within the Empire towards protecting birds and urging continued efforts for the extension of legislation where necessary. Referring to the legislation he promoted during his Governorship of Malta, Lord Methuen said the effect of the Bird Protection Act in Malta had not been so good as they had hoped. He thought as the people became better educated their efforts would meet with greater success. One thing which used to be particularly bad in Malta was the torture of birds used to entice other birds, and of the many birds in very small cages which might have been found near the Cathedral there. That, he believed, had been dealt with to a great extent.

Mr. R. C. Kermode, of Tasmania, seconded, and the resolution was carried.

A great deal of evidence collected by the society as to the destruction of sea birds by oil refuse discharged from ships was laid before the conference.

Lord Montagu of Beauieu testified to having found two swans in Southampton Water, one dead and the other dying from the effects of the oil. He moved a resolution approving the appointment of a committee of the International Shipping Conference to consider the oil pollution question and commending the promotion of the use of oil separators among the shipping companies.

Mr. F. D. Holcombe, hon. secretary of the British Sea Anglers' Society, seconded. He said the oil nuisance was particularly marked in the North Sea, and one of the ports which suffered most was Scarborough. At Bridlington the fish landed in the first quarter of this year was only 1782cwt, as compared with 3758cwt in the corresponding quarter of last year. At Filey