

THE NOTORNIS

THERE is no doubt that a stir was caused, first throughout New Zealand and later throughout the scientific world, when on Monday, 22nd November, the brief announcement appeared in the Press that Dr. G. B. Orbell had rediscovered the notornis surviving in the Fiordland National Park.

Fifty years have elapsed since 1898, when the bird was positively seen, although there have been many rumours and unauthenticated reports of it. In that year a specimen was caught by a dog belonging to two brothers named Ross, who were camping on the western shore of Lake Te Anau. Previous to that the only three occasions on which the bird was seen without doubt were at Resolution Island in 1849, when one was caught and eaten by some sealers—in 1851, when a Maori caught one on Secretary Island—and in 1879, when one was caught by a rabbit's dog at the junction of the Mararoa and Waiau Rivers. As these four reports were of individual, *non-surviving* birds taken in widely distributed localities, at wide intervals of time, the recent capture of both a male and female bird together and their *release again in their accustomed habitat*, is an event of outstanding ornithological interest.

With bird lovers, the pleasure imparted by the stirring news of their discovery was quickly tinged with fears for the safety of these

precious notornis survivors, and it was realised at the headquarters of our Society that action to secure for them protection from molestation was a matter of urgency. Therefore, after it had been ascertained that no legal provision existed whereby a portion of a National Park could be closed up, a deputation consisting of the President and Secretary waited upon the Hon. Mr. Parry, Minister of Internal Affairs, requesting his assistance in securing that an area including the whole of the western shores of Lake Te Anau and extending backwards to the summit of the Divide, consisting of about 320,000 acres, within which the notornis had been discovered, should be declared a Special Sanctuary under a strict entry-permit system. The Under-Secretary for Internal Affairs, and the Controller of the Wildlife Branch of the Internal Affairs Department were present at the interview. The Minister gave the deputation a sympathetic hearing, and it appears that the Lands Department was also sympathetic because on Monday, 29th November, the Minister of Lands, the Hon. Mr. Skinner, announced in the House that an area of 435,000 acres—more than the Society had suggested—had been declared a Sanctuary, which no one would be permitted to enter without a permit. So far so good, and it now remains to hope that the birds will be left in peace and allowed to work out their destiny without disturbance.

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