

# Birds and Bush of the Kaimanawas

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EARLY in the present year I took part in a 10-day trip to the headwaters of the Ngaruroro River, which rises in the north-eastern end of the Kaimanawa Ranges. This river is one of the major rivers of the North Island and has its source almost from the middle of the island. It has watersheds in common with the following large rivers—the Waikato, Rangitikei, Tuki Tuki, Tutaekuri and Mohaka, and through an intermediate saddle with the Rangitaiki. It traverses the Auckland-Wellington, and later the Wellington-Hawke's Bay provincial boundaries, and finally breaks through the ranges to flow across Hawke's Bay and enter the sea at Clive—halfway between Napier and Hastings.

As an illustration of how the headwaters of this river may be considered to lie in the centre of the main watershed of the North Island, certain members of the party in one afternoon had a drink of water from branches of the Ngaruroro, Rangitikei and Waikato Rivers. When one realises where these rivers flow into the sea and how far their mouths are apart, one may well understand how extensive an area this river drains.

From Mt. Mangarahi at the head of the Ngaruroro River very extensive panoramic views can be obtained, ranging from Mounts Edgecumbe and Tarawera in the north to the Tararua Range in the south, and from the Titiokura saddle on the Napier-Taupo road in the east, to Lake Taupo and the peaks of the National Park in the west.

In its upper reaches, the Ngaruroro River is fed by tributaries which rise in beautiful beech forested gullies and gorges to form the parent stream which courses for miles along a tussock-clad open valley, at an elevation of over 3000 feet. Here the beech forests recede from the valley floor but persist on the ridges and the spurs.

In the middle part of its course the river enters a series of deep, rugged, bush-clad gorges to emerge finally into the rich farm lands of Hawke's Bay.

The beech forests of this region are not the best type of bush for bird life as they do not supply much variety of food. Compared with our mixed rain forests they offer a poor substitute except for one or two species of native birds.

## THE DEER MENACE

The bush in all this region shows signs of extensive deer damage. Over a great extent of the area such species as the five-finger have been practically wiped out and many other trees have been extensively damaged. In traversing these forests we were appalled to note the extent of the death and destruction of the bush and to see the denudation of the forest floor by the deer, which are certainly noble looking animals. *But deer and native bush cannot live together for any long period. One or the other must go.* The deer cullers have been, and still are, doing efficient work in this region. Six years ago, when the writer was last in the area, more than one hundred deer were counted in the course of a single day's tramp in the upper river basin. On this last trip only 55 deer were counted in the whole 10 days. Much credit must be given to the Department of Internal Affairs and its officers and staff for using every endeavour to deal efficiently with the deer menace.

Our farthest out camp was pitched on the bush edge at Mount Mangarahi, close to the Tauranga-Taupo Divide. On a previous trip many wild cattle were seen in this bush. This time none were seen and no tracks noticed. This serves to confirm the statements of the back country people who state that where deer increase wild cattle tend to die out owing to the deer eating out the available food supply in the bush.

The bush on whose edge we pitched our top camp also showed extensive deer damage. There were no young trees—the forest floor was almost bare—even the species of hard fern present had been eaten down almost to the ground. Some of the large trees were scarred heavily by the rubbing of the deers' antlers. It was a saddening sight to realise that—uncontrolled—this beautiful forest was doomed to death and destruction through these animals, and even with heavy culling it will be many years before true regeneration is noticed.

Our party left from Hastings and proceeded along the Napier-Taihape road to the Owhaoko homestead, which is situated at an elevation of 3000 feet.

We left the homestead after lunch for the Golden Hills hut—16 miles away at the head of the Taruarau, a tributary of the Ngaruroro.