

# FOREST and BIRD



KOKAKO

*South Island or  
Orange-wattled  
Crow*

*(Callaeas cinerea)*

NUMBER 96

MAY, 1950.

*Issued Quarterly.*



# FOREST AND BIRD PROTECTION SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc.)

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## APPEAL FOR BEQUESTS.

Is there any cause more worthy of bequests by public-spirited citizens than the objectives of the Forest and Bird Protection Society, which is working wholly and solely for the welfare of New Zealand, present and future? Here is a suggested form of bequest:—

*"I give and bequeath the sum of..... to the Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand (Incorporated), and I declare that the receipt of the Treasurer for the time being of the said Society shall be a complete discharge to my executors for the legacy hereby given to such Society."*

The work and record of the Society, the personnel of its membership and Executive are a good guarantee that the best possible use will be made of such bequests.

## CALL FOR SANCTUARIES.

The Society would also welcome the responsibility of administering suitable sanctuaries for land or sea birds, provided that a small annuity is added for the payment of a caretaker. *Such sanctuaries could be named after the donor, and would thus be a perpetuation of his name as a saviour of New Zealand's forest and bird life.* It is suggested that such sanctuaries should be administered in a manner to ensure their return to their original and natural conditions as nearly as possible.

*Affiliated with the Society for the Preservation of the Fauna of the British Empire (Patron, His Majesty King George VI) and with the International Committee for the Protection of Wild Birds.*

Member of the International Union for the Protection of Nature (IUPN).

# Removing Protection From New Zealand's "Butcher Bird"

**N**OTWITHSTANDING that the campaign for the removal of protection from the Australian magpie has been proceeding for over 15 years without success, the evidence against it continues to accumulate and proves conclusively that the remedy sought should no longer be denied.

## A NUISANCE AND A MENACE

Under protection it has increased to such numbers in some areas, notably in the Manawatu, Rangitikei, Hawkes Bay, Wairarapa and Canterbury districts, that it has become both a nuisance and a menace, a formidable destroyer of our already sadly reduced native bird life, and a frequent attacker of adults and children. Undoubtedly it does good by eating grass grubs, etc., on pastoral land; but it is questionable whether the services it renders in this respect are not negated by its destruction of small native and imported birds which are insectivorous. As the late Captain E. V. Sanderson, founder and for many years President of this Society, declared in 1942: "NO WILD CREATURE OR WILD PLANT CAN BE SUCCESSFULLY INTRODUCED EXCEPT AT THE EXPENSE OF EXISTING FORMS OF WILD LIFE." This has certainly proved true in the case of the magpie, for it is an aggressive bird and devours its prey, particularly young fledglings which it seems to regard as a delicacy.

Though it has been pointed out before it is just as well that it should be emphasised that the so-called magpie in New Zealand is not a magpie. Ornithologists in Australia call it a crow-shrike, because it has the bill of a crow and the habits of a shrike. The Australian Butcher Bird is a shrike, and is thus named because it impales its victims on thorns or on the spikes of barbed wire. Whatever may be the habits of the magpie in Australia, it is evident that it has at any rate acquired habits in New Zealand that justify its being called "New Zealand's 'Butcher Bird.'"

## NATIVE BIRDS THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION

"If we are not careful in a few years the only birds in New Zealand will be magpies and sparrows," declared Mr. H. M. Glazebrook at a meeting of the Hawkes Bay County Council. "I have seen the birds attack men. They take eggs, kill other birds, and chase dogs." He added that tuis were among their victims. In these remarks he was supported by A. W. Cooper Smith, who said he had seen magpies carrying off other young birds from their nests.

Is this sort of thing to be winked at? The North Canterbury Acclimatisation Society, which has taken a leading part for the removal of protection—it does not aim at extermination—has pronounced the magpie to be "an aggressive bird, increasing in numbers and destroying and displacing other birds, including beneficial native species. On the plains and near the rivers there has been a marked decrease of numbers of banded dotterel and black-fronted tern since the recent increase of the magpie. Banded dotterel are entirely insectivorous and were formerly most abundant on areas where the magpie alone is now seen. The black-fronted tern, in much reduced numbers, still accounts for large quantities of wire worms and grass grubs. . . . Near the bush the increase and spread of tuis, bellbirds and pigeons is almost entirely prevented when magpies are present: indeed, the natives are usually driven back."

At a meeting of the Wellington Acclimatisation Society, Mr. T. Andrews, Palmerston North ranger, reported that on several occasions he had counted flocks of magpies numbering 40 or 50. He was concerned as to what would happen when their food supply became scarce. He knew of isolated cases where the magpies killed new-born lambs; that sort of thing spread. One liberated pheasant, when it flew to open paddocks, was immediately horribly mutilated by three magpies.

It is not surprising that in these circumstances the Society is preparing a "dossier of crimes" by the magpie.

But still evidence accumulates. Out of many cases recorded in our files we cite the following instances taken at random.

#### ATTACKS ON SHEEP

WANGANUI: "While working at the sheep yards one day my attention was called to an unusual commotion among the magpies, which were out of sight over a rise. I sent one of my boys to the spot to investigate, and after a time he returned to say that he had found all the magpies attacking an unfortunate ewe that had rolled over on her back against a log. The birds had destroyed the eyes of the sheep before he could reach it, and, of course, he had to kill the sheep."

W. S. SUTHERLAND, Kawhia: "Here are a few more instances of the pugnacity of magpies in South Wairarapa: (1) A full-grown sheep that could not run away being pecked until there was a wound about six inches across in the back and reaching through to the intestines; sheep still alive. (2) A native pigeon killed and practically plucked. (3) A harrier hawk trying to defend itself by lying on its back and fighting with its feet. (4) Two magpies trying to catch a sparrow hawk. (5) Myself with an inch-long wound in my scalp."

#### DANGEROUS TO ADULTS AND CHILDREN

Two magpies attacked and so severely injured a man walking near a belt of macropcarpa trees at Mangateretere, 11 miles south-west from Napier in November, 1948, that he had to be taken to hospital for medical treatment. The assault lasted for several minutes, and was concentrated on the man's face and head, each magpie taking it in turn to dive down and screaming.

BAINESSE SCHOOL, Palmerston North: Children viciously attacked by magpies while at play.

WANGANUI: Cases quoted when three men on separate occasions were attacked by magpies.

Many other instances of attacks on adults and children have been reported from various parts of the country.

#### ENEMIES OF SMALL BIRDS

NORTH AUCKLAND: "A boy gave a tui to me which had been attacked by five magpies. They had taken one eye out and left the bird in such a condition I thought it best to kill it."

BURWOOD: "Only last spring I saw a magpie taking young sparrows straight from the nest and placing them direct into the mouth of a young magpie perched beside its parent."

CAPTAIN E. V. SANDERSON: "The magpie appears to be especially down on the Pipit, which is entirely insectivorous, and certainly decreasing round the Wellington district."

MAHIA, H.B.: "A pair of magpies nested in a tree close to the house. I actually saw them raiding a thrush's nest, as I was attracted by the agitation of the mother thrush. The magpie threw the young thrushes on to the lawn, then pecked them to death, and carried the bodies back to the young magpies."

KOPANE, Palmerston North: "Our pet budgie . . . flew out on to the lawn. Three magpies that were on the lawn killed him and flew away, taking the budgie with them. Also some magpies took a nest of thrushes and wax-eyes."

NORTH CANTERBURY: "I've seen many small birds being chased by magpies, who, of course, are a real nuisance to human beings on golf courses."

CANTERBURY: "Although Canterbury has a very large magpie population, mobs of up to forty being seen in some districts, they are mostly in areas where there are no small native birds."

PALMERSTON NORTH: "I witnessed the slaughter of a large young thrush by a magpie the other day. After killing the bird it carried it about 50 yards and proceeded to peck its head off. . . . I found another thrush not far off without its head. My brother found a fantail on his property without its head."

WOODVILLE: "Twice I have seen a magpie carrying off a fledgling—on one occasion beating its prey on the ground as a thrush does a snail before eating it. . . . The tuis always disappear when magpies are about."

WANGANUI: "I have seen magpies diving at skylarks in mid-air, chasing them from the sky."

OTAKI: "They kill young chickens, and when they see the hens they go after them, fly on their backs and peck them."

On top of all this, leading ornithologists throughout the Dominion declare the magpie to be harmful to native birds.

In the light of the evidence thus supplied it cannot be questioned that the Australian magpie through its predatory habits in this country has well deserved the name of "New Zealand's 'Butcher Bird.'" Yet it is only its removal from protection, not its extermination, that is being asked for. Removal from protection simply means that in districts where settlers wish to retain the magpie they may do so, while in other areas where they have become a nuisance as well as a menace their numbers may be reduced, even to the point of extermination. But to achieve this the present agitation must be strongly pressed.

COVER PICTURE (From a Water-Colour by the late Miss L. A. Daff)

# ORANGE-WATTLED CROW

*Callaeas cinerea*  
Kokako

THE gentle confiding manners, the rich, flute-like notes, the peculiar mode of progression even, cannot fail to draw the attention of the observer, albeit he may not be imbued with enthusiasm for gazing on the life that stirs in our woods. The ardent naturalist who has the chance of knowing this bird must learn to love it." Unfortunately, few of us are able to see the kokako as Potts saw it, as it is now confined to Stewart Island and parts of the forested mountainous districts of the South

Island. It is exceedingly tame, and this, added to the fact that it is largely a ground feeder, has made it the easy prey of dogs, cats, and other vermin.

In the North Island is a very similar bird, the blue-wattled crow. Whereas in the South Island crow the wattles are orange with a little blue at the base, in the North Island bird the wattles are bright blue all over. "Few sounds are so enchanting as when a party of these birds is practising a number of rich flute and organ-like notes, many as if in chord, and some ventriloquial."

## Objects of the Society

To advocate and obtain efficient protection and preservation of our native forests and birds, enlisting the natural sympathy of our young, unity of control of all wild life and the preservation of sanctuaries, scenic reserves, etc., in the native state.

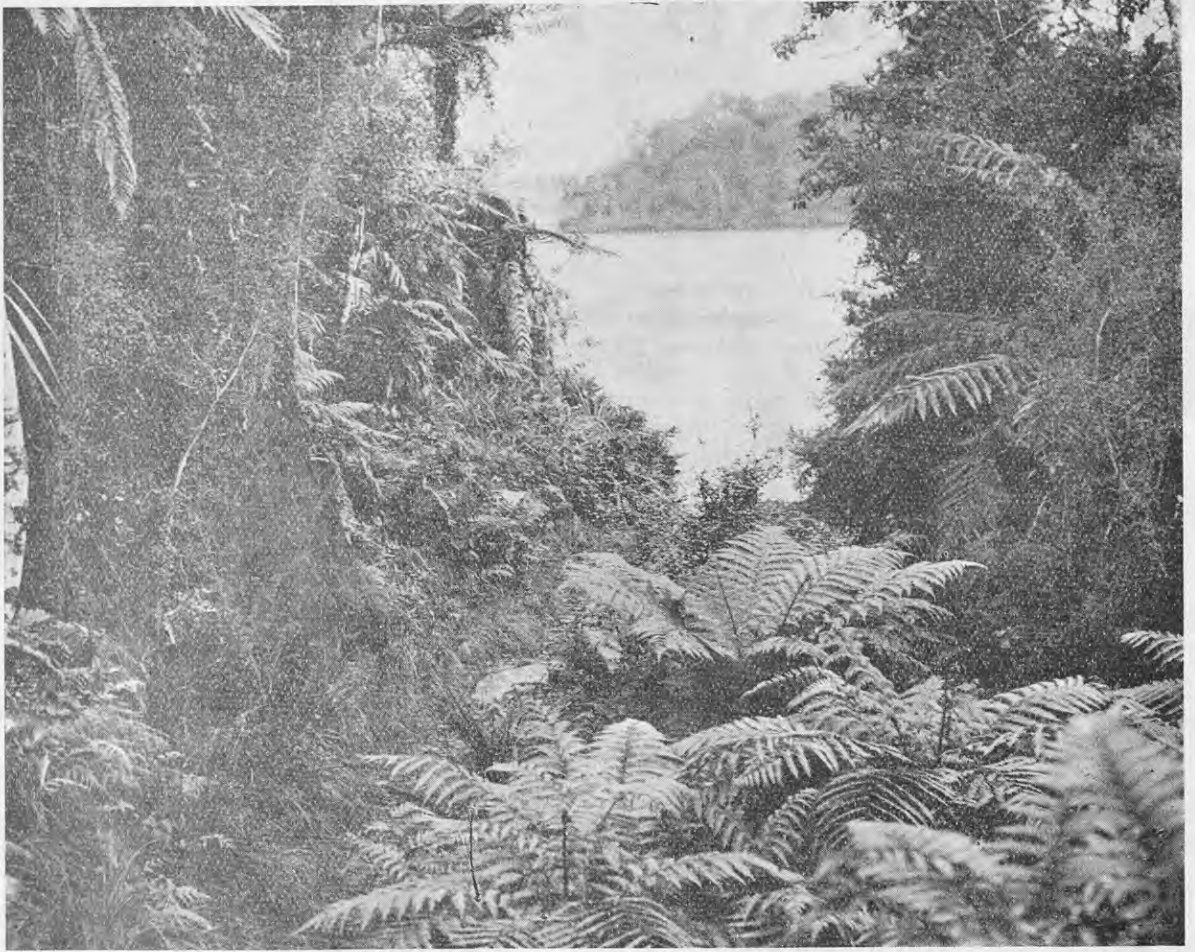
PLANT TREES FOR YOUR VERY LIVES!





SCENE IN THE BULLER GORGE.

Photo E(l)s Dudgeon, F.R.S.A., M.R.P.S.



Untouched Bush Conserves Water.

Floods in Australia! Lack of Electricity in  
New Zealand!!

New Zealanders! Save Your Native Bush—  
Plant Your Hillside with Native Trees.

# ALBINO FANTAIL

By HENRY G. BAILEY.

**T**HROUGHOUT the years we have been charmed by the presence of many native birds in this small garden sanctuary, some merely visitors, others making it a home in which to rear their little families. Amongst the latter are the fantails.

Last summer a pair of pied fantails had a lovely little family of three. I wonder if any reached maturity, one I know did not. I found it one evening on top of a stone pillar and beside a drinking fountain, just a wee tiny ball of fluff with its wee head tucked under its wing. It was not dead, but how helpless was I to revive it!

This little family was very interesting, but we got a greater thrill just a week ago. We were busy trying to entice a pair of pied fantails to come closer when my wife directed my

attention to what she thought was a little yellow canary. No canary ever had such a long tail for its size, or ever carried it in that erect position, so we discovered it to be a fantail. It soon started to demonstrate its dexterity in chasing flies, and came much closer, so that we were able to observe it both in flight and at rest on a branch.

Its plumage was of a creamy white, the breast slightly darker, a pale buff, and the tail when expanded appeared to be all white. When, however, it settled on a branch to enjoy a captured fly and closed its fan, the tail took on a dark colour.

Evidently the progeny of the pair of beautiful pied birds, it was, I would think, a case of an albino.

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# BRIDAL VEIL FALLS

By GORDON V. GOW.

**T**HIS is the picturesque but very appropriate name of a very pretty waterfall in the Te Mata district in Raglan County.

The township of Te Mata is about five miles along a side road which branches from the main road to Raglan at a point some six miles from Raglan, and the falls are another five miles further on after passing the local store. Much publicity has been given to the falls of late as the result of an agitation by local residents and others to have the area embracing the falls safeguarded by the creation of a Domain Board or similar body which would be responsible for its care and preservation as well as for the reforestation of part of the area.

The access track from the road to the falls has lately been put in order and, after a pleasant walk of some minutes through the native bush, one suddenly emerges and finds oneself on the edge of a precipice looking down over a bush-covered valley, while the waters of the stream which the track has followed plunge over the abyss at one's feet.

On reaching the foot of the falls by means of a steep rugged track through the bush, and not till then, one sees the cascade to advantage.

As the waters descend through almost 200 feet of sheer drop the veil of spray is wafted this way and that in ever-changing form in a most fascinating manner. No wonder the choice of name for the falls is such a happy one.

The geological structure of the waterfall is interesting. Like most falls it depends for its existence on hard rock overlying a softer formation which latter in course of time erodes at a quicker rate.

In this case the uppermost material is columnar basaltic rock lying on sandstone. The appearance of the former is reminiscent of the famed Fingal's cave in the island of Staffa. The sandstone flanking three sides of the pool at the base of the fall, including the recessed space behind the curtain of falling waters, is clothed in a close growth of para-taniwha, that fascinating plant which is such a feature of the gorges of the Wanganui river. The constant showers of spray provide ideal conditions for this plant.



**KINGFISHER ABOUT TO  
ENTER ITS NEST IN WHICH  
IT HAS A BABY BROOD.**

*Photo C. A. Fleming.*



**FOR SALE**

(Post Free unless otherwise stated)

	Price	Price
ALBUM DEPICTING 24 FOREST-INHABITING BIRDS, in colour. In dark brown or maroon cover—state preference. (Retail price £1.) Special price to members of Society - -	15/-	"BIRD WATCHING," by M. M. Atkinson - -
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		"THE WAIPOUA KAURI FOREST OF NORTHERN NEW ZEALAND," by W. R. McGregor -
		5/-
		— PAMPHLETS —
		"BEHOLD YOUR NATIVE FORESTS," by E. L. Kehoe - - - - - per doz.
		2/-
		"THE CRIME AGAINST THE LAND," by Y. T. Shand - - - - - 6d. each; per doz.
		3/6
		"DESTRUCTION OF AN AVIAN PARADISE," by Mrs. Perrine Moncrieff. 3d. each; per doz.
		2/6

## Along the Track

**BANKS PENINSULA.**—It may interest you to hear that we saw a male North Island or White-breasted Tomtit in a manuka bush here today. We are grateful for your book, "Forest-Inhabiting Birds" for enabling us to identify it.

**MIRAMAR.**—On 31st December we were favoured with a visit from a tui, attracted no doubt by the profuse display of pohutukawa blossom that was in full bloom at the time. It would settle on a tree for a while and get busy drinking the nectar from the flowers, then take a short kind of survey flight around the district, always at a considerable height, but always return to our plantation of pohutukawas.

We have concentrated on planting honey-bearing native trees for some years now, and are very pleased to report visits from many native birds that were not seen previously.

This summer a pair of silver-eyes built a nest and reared four young quite close to the house; they used to take a great delight in washing under the fine spray from the hose.

It appears to me that many people do not grow suitable trees for the birds because they have not sufficient space, but from my observations if everybody grew only one native tree the birds would make use of it.

**APPLEBY—GUARDIAN OF THE PEAR TREE.**—A friend of mine has on his farm a very large old pear tree which bears abundantly. Just before each fruiting season a tui makes his home in the tree and takes his toll of the ripening pears, but woe betide any other bird which approaches the tree to do likewise! The farmer is quite content and regards the pears the tui damages as his wages for saving the rest.

**TASMAN BAY.**—Near where we were camping this summer there are numbers of blue heron. At one time I counted nine of them in the air indulging in aerobatics and playing together. Such a large number in one flock must, I think, be unusual, and is most pleasing.

**NELSON.**—On a recent visit to a tidal estuary on the western side of Tasman Bay, I derived considerable interest from watching a colony of shags. There were about 60 birds in the colony—mostly black, but a number had white throats and one or two were silver grey

or spotted. One morning they came inshore with only their heads above water, and being in more or less single file might have given rise to a sea-serpent story. A few mornings later they came inshore and assembled on a sandbank, while seagulls flew overhead in apparent hostility. The small red-billed gull appeared to be at home among the shags, but the larger gulls did not associate. Later, when the shags had evidently fed well on small fish, the gulls flew overhead and swooped down upon the shags possibly intent on making them disgorge the meal. The shags took refuge under water and only a few of the heads appeared at one moment. The gulls kept up the noisy attack for about half an hour, nor was this an isolated instance of their hostility. Occasionally a shag would take refuge in flight, and in each case the shag was slightly faster than its attackers. On several occasions a solitary shag was timed for 20 seconds submerged, and in one instance the time was 25 seconds.

**MARLBOROUGH.**—In the course of several visits to Pelorus Reserve I have had ample opportunity of studying the birds, particularly the tui and the bellbird, which appear to be adapting themselves to changed conditions. Unfortunately, the wood-hen is rarely if ever seen, and one cannot ignore the possibility that dogs and cats are responsible—a matter that should be watched by those in authority. Pigeons used to be plentiful in the Reserve and adjacent valleys, but are now rarely seen. One is forced to the conclusion that these magnificent birds have been destroyed by irresponsible sportsmen who prefer easy targets to an energetic chase after a wild pig. Sparrows and chaffinches are becoming very tame owing to feeding by visitors. These birds have adopted the system of feeding on the nectar exuded by the round pink grub embedded in the bark of the beech trees. The nectar is found at the tips of the hair-like feelers which indicate the presence of the grub. The tuis or bellbirds strongly resent this invasion of their food supplies, and I witnessed many attacks where sparrows were driven far away from the tree-trunks and trees which supplied the food, often being compelled to seek refuge on the ground, where the native birds refrained from attacking. In feeding, the sparrows have adopted the same method as the native birds—i.e., by climbing up the tree trunks and feeding as they go. The sparrow



appears to be more able to dodge the tui on an upward flight, but has a genuine respect for both tui and bellbird when either makes a swift downward flight. For half an hour at a time I watched the battle going on.

On several occasions I watched a tui at his music lessons and he followed three distinct themes. The first was a harsh croaking noise. Then followed much extending of throat and snapping of beak before three trumpet notes were emitted, and these sounded very much like the notes of a child's toy trumpet. Then was heard the exquisite melody for which the bird is famous, and in it was a challenge against man's destruction of his forest home and feathered companions.

FRANZ JOSEF.—The roadman drew our attention to something unusual, and on alighting from the car I saw it was a pure albino pigeon. I approached to about 20 feet and was able to see its pink eyes—not a blemish on the whole pure white bird.

WAIMAUKU.—The Government Reserve adjoins our land. There are many birds of all kinds—pheasants, quail, red-fronted parrakeets, tuis, pigeons, mallard and grey duck, grey warblers, silvereyes, fantails, screech owls, more-porks, hawks, kingfishers and numerous other

small birds. The bush comprises kauri, puriri, nikau palms, pohutukawa, rimu, totara, honey-suckle and kowhai.

WELLINGTON.—At 3 p.m. on the 25th September, 1949, I heard that harbinger of Spring, the first song of the Shining Cuckoo, in the Wellington Botanical Gardens. By the song I judged that there were at least three of these birds in the gardens. It was a fine afternoon, but it may have been the odd Grey Warbler singing that was giving them such joyous cause for the fine choir they had.

At this early season, it will be noted, the notes of the Shining Cuckoo's song sound like "irish, irish, irish"—repeated with a rising inflection and ending on the last note with "stew"; but as the season advances they have less and less "irish" and more and more "stew" in their song, until just before they leave in January their song is just a series of stews.

STRATFORD.—In my garden is a *Plagi-anthus* which is about 20 feet high and is now changing its foliage: it shows the adult foliage at top and the juvenile interlaced foliage underneath. I preferred not to cut it. One or two others are 18ft. high or more, and a few more from 16ft. down to 8ft. high; anything lower are of more recent plantings.

## NATIVE or EXOTIC?

THE following is an extract from the editorial of the January, 1950, "Tararua Trampler," the journal of the Tararua Tramping Club, headed "New Zealand Forests," which we publish with acknowledgement:—

"New Zealand was once blessed with a wide-spread native forest, but with the advent of enterprising pioneers and bushmen much of this has disappeared. . . . The planting of exotics is still so popular that many of us feel that New Zealand is losing the individuality which she has gained through her unique native forests. This degeneration is accelerated every year when fires destroy native forests and when the existing exotics continue to grow with their characteristic rapidity. The prospects of small native forest reserves retained with a museum tranquillity midst towering exotics do not appeal. . . . Why should two leading

South Island tourist centres be surrounded with stately exotics? At least they do illustrate to the overseas visitor just how beautiful his exotics can look if they are placed in an ideal landscape!

"But what of the future? Will the much-needed drive towards a judicious reforestation with native flora occur? Will there be a greater development of native plant nurseries? Will our existing forests receive the care and attention which scientific research recommends? Only time can answer these real posers; meanwhile it's surely our desire to strive for the maintenance and restoration of our New Zealand forests. To this end we must support all drives aimed at the elimination of anything which may destroy or retard the beautiful flora which is ours."

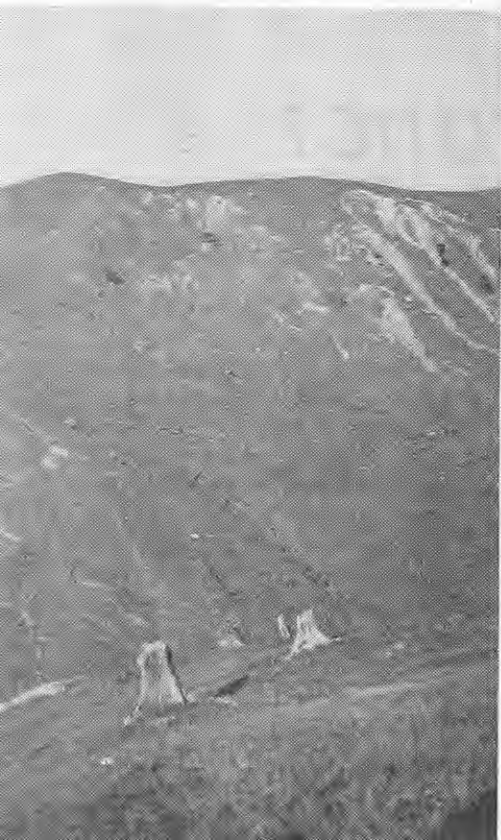
## Takahea or Takahe

MR. JOHANNES C. ANDERSEN states that W. B. D. Mantell, the scientist who first found the fossil skeleton in Taranaki, and later secured the skin and some of the bones of the first living specimen found, in Otago, was in Otago and in close contact with the Maori as Government officer for negotiating the purchase of the greater part of Otago. Moreover, he learnt from the Maori that the name of the bird was moho in the North and takahe (he heard no alternative) in the South. Both names were known in the North—moho and takahe—and both these names (never takahea) appeared in the first science paper about the bird, published by Mantell's father, the English geologist and physician, in London in 1850; the fossil had been discovered in 1848. There is a reason for the final "e" of the name being taken by some ears for a sound approaching "ea", and that is, the "e" had the long sound of "e" in the word "bend"; but no Maori ear and no pakeha ear, conversant with Maori, would take it for "ea." In Williams' Dictionary, both forms, takahe, and tahakea, are given, but takahe

comes first, the other only as an occasional alternative; and the first pakeha to find the bird and learn its name from the Maori of the North and of the South, recorded "takahe" from the first, and only takahe (with moho as the name in the North).

Mr. Anderson also points out that the scientific name of the living bird is *Notornis hochstetteri*, and not *Notornis mantelli*, which is the name given to the fossil bird, the two species showing slight differences. He adds, "I admit that Mantell's name *ought* to go with the living bird, but unfortunately it has been decreed otherwise."

(As stated in an editorial note in our issue of Feb. 1949 the name was given as Takahea on the authority of the late Jas. Cowan, a noted authority on Maori matters. As regards the scientific name, scientific opinion is now swinging towards giving the name *Notornis mantelli* to all species of notornis so far found. Present opinion is that the differences in structure in the species found are so fine as not to warrant subdivision.—Ed.)

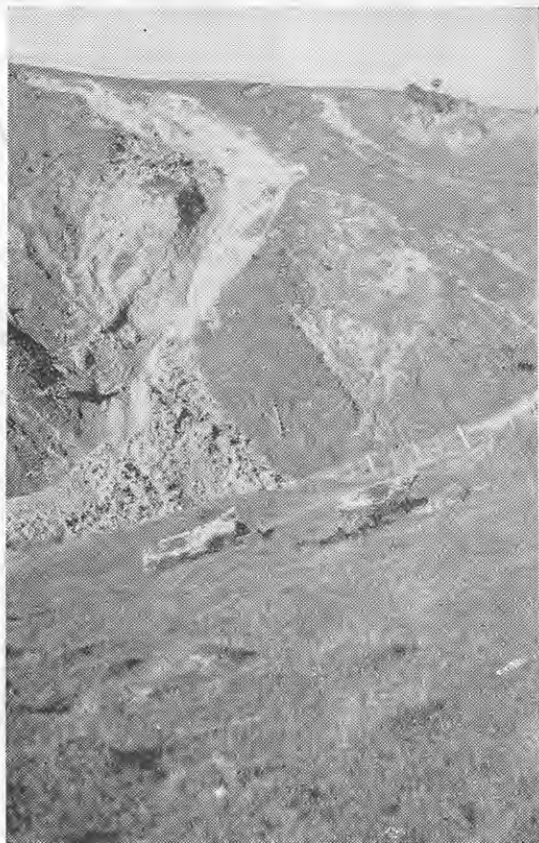



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The correspondent who sent us these photographs stated that this country was originally covered with heavy totara, matai and a little rimu. Up to August last year 80 to 90 ewes were run on this face, but now it will barely carry 50. Readers will note the shingle slide which will cover the fertile lands below. Where native bush is milled or destroyed native trees should be planted.

Photo F. Chatfield.

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# Quarterly Newsletter

**Auckland Section.**—The Section's chief item of interest is the offer of a piece of bush by Mr. H. Alexander, of Clevedon. Negotiations as regards this are proceeding.

In November last the Section had two field days both under the leadership of Mr. R. B. Sibson. The first was to the Firth of Thames, and with a special bus and private cars the number present was 61. In the course of the day a large number of different species were seen, among them being pukeko, godwits, knots, banded dotterels, turnstones, stints, pectoral and curlew sandpipers, Caspian terns, wrybills, and a pair of banded rail, as well as the more familiar gulls. Pipits, skylarks, starlings, yellowhammers and native pigeon were seen from the bus while travelling.

Under the auspices of the Section, Professor McGregor will be giving a series of talks on natural history subjects to junior members on Saturday mornings, in his lecture room at the Auckland University College. The Auckland Hon. Secretary asks that all juniors who have not yet let her know if they wish to be notified do so at once.

The second outing was by launch to Motuihi Island which, after being a quarantine station for many years and during the war a Naval Training centre, has now been opened to the public. The birds seen here were chiefly land birds, such as bellbirds, kingfishers and grey warblers. The children were principally interested in the gannets, gulls and terns; in this connection our Auckland correspondent, from whose account of the field day this is condensed, ends up with a remark which we have pleasure in publishing, "The interest of the young folk is the wild creatures' life insurance."

**Christchurch Section.**—Thirty members of the Christchurch Section visited the Heathcote Estuary on 7th November, 1949, to observe oyster catchers and stilts. A call was made at Ferrymead, where Mr. L. Shearman gave a talk on his observations on kingfishers made over a long period in his own garden. Then the party moved on to Scarborough Head, where at close quarters observations were made on the nesting habits of spotted and black shags, black-backed and black-billed gulls, and white-fronted terns.

Just prior to going to press we received the notice of the Section's first meeting for the year, on 19th April, at which movie films of the Castle Hill and Scarborough outings taken by Mrs. W. S. McGibbon and Mr. Hugh Denys were to be shown, also coloured slides of Lake Paringa and Milford Sound by Mr. McCaskill.

**Motu Maire Island.**—This island, which lies between Paihia and Waitangi in the Bay of Islands and is 10 acres in extent, has been placed by the Lands Department under the control of the Paihia Domain Board. Mr. Vernon H. Reed, Chairman of the Board, states that it is intended to plant the island with native trees and shrubs. The part of the island which is near Waitangi adjoins the position where H.M.S. Herald was anchored in 1840. The Waitangi National Trust will assist in

the work. Flowering trees and shrubs will be planted and berry trees to attract native birds.

**Toreparu Swamp Sanctuary.**—The Society has been successful in having the greater part of this swamp declared a sanctuary. It lies near Aotea Harbour on the west coast of the North Island. Owing to a peculiarity of land subdivision, the boundaries of the surrounding properties adjoin within the swamp, so that each landowner owns a portion of it. Mr. Harry A. Brown, of Te Mata, obtained the signatures of the majority of these to a petition, and it is the portion of the swamp owned severally by the petitioners which has been gazetted a sanctuary. As this embraces the greater part of the swamp, the whole swamp, to all intents and purposes, becomes a sanctuary. The Society regards the creation of this sanctuary with great satisfaction, as it places great importance on the preservation of a reasonable number of our remaining swamp areas in the interests both of soil conservation and the maintenance of our waterfowl.

**Importation of Vultures?**—A well-known writer on nature matters, writing in a New Zealand paper, mentions a suggestion that vultures be imported into New Zealand to deal with the many sheep carcasses which foul the streams and provide a breeding place for blowflies. He goes on to discuss which vultures it would be best to introduce! We hope he was writing with his tongue in his cheek. There is already a bounty on the head of kahu, the harrier, whose natural job it is to do this work, because he takes toll of chicken, pheasants, etc. We wonder how long it would be before the vultures found other easy sources of food, like the stoats which were imported to keep down rabbits, and have killed off untold numbers of native birds. Vultures are probably timid and do not tackle other than dead or very feeble animals in their natural state. But it must be remembered that the actions of acclimatised predators are unpredictable owing to differences in natural associations. In the vultures' normal habitat there are usually predatory animals which are not present, except in a minor form, in New Zealand, and it is quite possible, should he increase beyond the limits imposed by the supply of carrion and be driven to boldness by hunger, that he might, like the much-abused kea, soon learn that lambs and other domestic animals and fowls, are not so closely protected from predators in New Zealand as they are in his own country.

**Native Trees round Karapiro Lake.**—The Whangarei Forest and Bird Protection Society has asked this Society's co-operation in its requests to the Government that only native trees and shrubs be planted round this lake. The Society had great pleasure in complying. The lake and its surrounds are under the control of the State Hydro-Electric Department and 40 acres have been made a Domain under the Karapiro Lake Domain Board. The Society will continue to advocate, we hope successfully, this very worthwhile object.



BANDED DOTTEREL ON NEST.

Photo - Kenneth Biggs.



# The South Island Robin

By A. P. HARPER

IN appearance and size the South Island robin is very like his English namesake except that he has a yellow instead of a red breast. Because of this likeness our robin has inherited much of the sentiment and affection which tradition has built up for his British counterpart.

When robins were plentiful in the South in the old days, and to be seen in such numbers, they were looked upon as "such dear little things—so friendly and tame." Their fearlessness was taken for friendliness, and their beautiful song was assumed to be a "song of joy, etc.," evidencing their happy nature.

This was quite a natural conclusion to the casual observer, especially if he remembered the Robin Redbreast of Britain—but old bushmen who studied this attractive little bird realised that he wasn't, quite, such a sweet little chap as some believed.

In reality the South Island robin is a quarrelsome and rather vicious little fellow. A family of 4 or 5 seemed to spend most of their time fighting and squabbling—a great contrast to the family harmony and self-denial of the wekas.

The robin's song is as beautiful as any in the bush, but close observation seems to point to the fact that instead of being "a song of joy," it is more often a challenge to others of his kind.

Its fearlessness is not friendliness, but simply a cheeky determination to take full advantage of its object's assistance in exposing grubs.

When going along a bush track one used to be followed by several robins, squabbling

amongst themselves and so fearless that they were literally almost on one's heels.

Observation showed that they were really watching for grubs exposed in the footsteps. They would dart in, pick up a grub and at once fly to a nearby tree and deposit it in the rough bark or moss for future use. They would go on for hours, so it is difficult to understand how they could remember where the food was "planted."

Now, at first sight, this close and fearless attendance seems to prove the robin's friendliness to man, but if a horse happens to come along the track, such a theory is shown to be wrong, for the birds will at once leave the man and follow the horse.

Why? Because the horse has four feet instead of a paltry two and can expose more grubs! So much for friendliness to man.

In the distant past when a camp was made in the bush a weka and a robin would come and settle down in the locality in order to benefit from any scraps of food. In each case the rule applied that "possession is nine points of the law," for no other weka or robin was allowed to come near. Both birds were able to hold their claim against all comers.

The weka is "death on robins" and always ready to kill them, so it was interesting to watch how cleverly the robin avoided the many attempts of his enemy to catch him, and to observe the weka's cunning manoeuvres to do so.

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**SANDERSON SANCTUARY FUND**  
Received to date £253 11s. 8d.

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The Forest and Bird Protection Society of N.Z. (Inc.), invites all those who have respect for our wonderful and unique native birds, all those who realise the great economic and aesthetic value of birds, all those who wish to preserve our unrivalled scenic beauties, to band together with the Society in an earnest endeavour fully to awaken public interest and secure efficient preservation, conservation, and intelligent utilisation of our great heritage.

The subscriptions are—Life members £10:—Endowment members £1, Ordinary members 7/6, Children 2/6, per annum. Endowment members comprise those who desire to contribute in a more helpful manner towards the preservation of our birds and forests. Besides this, we ask for your co-operation in assisting to conserve your own heritage. Is it not worth while? This Magazine is issued quarterly to all subscribers without further charge.

# Miriam Ballard Memorial Essay Competition

## PRIZEWINNERS, 1950.

**First Prize:** CRAWFORD SCOTT PENNYCOOK, age 15, 104 Beverley Rd., Timaru, Timaru Boys' High School.

**Second Prize:** HAROLD V. COOP, age 15, 9 Renfrew Ave., Mt. Albert, Auckland, Auckland Grammar School.

The Society congratulates these two and thanks the other competitors. The First Prize Essay is printed below.

## OBSERVATIONS OF THE CASPIAN TERN

(*Tara-nui*)

(*Hydroprogne caspia*)

FOR the last three years, I have been observing the habits of a colony of Caspian Tern, which nest at Waitarakao Lagoon, Washdyke, Timaru. These birds are not numerous, although I have counted sixty-four in a nesting colony. In appearance the adult is very striking, with its large orange-red beak, jet-black cap, pure white underplumage, and pale grey back. On shore, it is very ungainly, as its body looks too heavy for its short legs, but in flight it has grace, combined with great "manoeuvre-ability" and power.

In this district, the first bird arrives in mid-July, and from then they gradually increase in numbers until early September, when the first egg is laid. On 9th September, 1947, there were twenty birds, and one egg; on 6th September, 1948, twenty-four birds and eight nests, with one, two, and three eggs; and on 6th September, 1949, twenty-two birds and two eggs. Every week, the numbers rapidly increase, until early November, when the laying is almost finished, and chicks range from newly hatched to half-grown.

Most nests consist of sticks and stones, arranged in a hollow, with occasionally a few feathers and scraps of seaweed. They lie close together, and usually contain two, sometimes three, fawn eggs, heavily blotched with brown and grey, and about the size of a hen's egg.

During the nesting period they display nervousness, and are difficult to approach, the whole colony arising with a great clamour while you are still some distance away. They are warned in

plenty of time by the scouts, who utter their characteristic raucous squawks, "Kark-ka-ka-kark." These scouts often betray the presence of the colony before it is in sight.

Small fish seem to be the diet of the sitting birds. I have seen Caspians come in from the sea, land on the edge of the colony, and with the fish held crosswise in the beak, thread their way among the others. Often they are pecked at, but finally find their mates, to whom they feed their fish.

The newly-hatched chicks, which resemble balls of creamy-white fluff faintly mottled on the back, lie perfectly still, but as they grow older they resent interference, and show their fright by opening the beak and uttering faint, harsh noises. The half-grown young, on disturbance, are herded by the adult birds to the edge of the sea, where they are often badly tumbled by the incoming waves.

A common enemy to both eggs and chicks is the Black-backed Gull. Immediately the colony is disturbed, the gulls come swooping in, but are attacked and driven off by the parent birds. Many shells with large holes in the side have been found. Very often the colonies are washed away by heavy seas, but these persevering birds immediately set up a new nesting site. For example, in 1948, between August 31st and September 21st, the eggs were washed away three times, but despite this a successful brood was raised in late December.

—CRAWFORD S. PENNYCOOK.



Two young black-backed gulls on Rangitoto Island. Photo by Harold V. Coop, second prize-winner, Miriam Ballard Memorial Essay Competition.



Original sketches by Miss R. Shanks (13 years).

# BIRD SONG



POETS used to think that birds sang from the sheer joy of living; modern scientists, however, think otherwise. Maybe high spirits sometimes have something to do with it, but it is much more likely that their singing has some definite purpose, such as to warn other birds off their own little patch of territory, or to attract a mate. Injured birds have been known to sing and that can hardly have been from joy.

Birds sing most during the nesting season, probably first to establish a territory and sing defiance to other males who might feel disposed to trespass on it, and then to advertise "an eligible husband for disposal." The cock will go on singing to his mate on the nest during the nesting season, at the same time warning off intruders, but he will not go too near the nest for fear of giving its position away: the hen would probably drive him away if he did.

Most birds have an alarm note—short and sharp—which will either cause other birds to scatter or sometimes to band together for attack. Tuis, for instance, will sometimes band to attack an intruder, such as a hawk, and believe me the hawk generally goes—quickly!

Swamp birds such as duck and pukeko when feeding usually post a sentinel to watch for danger—they can then keep their heads down with a feeling of security. When he senses danger the sentinel will begin to utter a series of low squawks, to put the others on their guard; when the danger comes too close, up he goes with the others after him.

The art of singing is confined almost exclusively to what are known as "perching" birds—that is, birds that perch in trees or shrubs. Sea birds, waterfowl and ground birds generally have only a harsh note. This is probably because the perching birds, being at a later stage of evolution than the others—more highly civilised, so to speak—have more highly developed throat muscles.

The tui has a whispering song, when, though you can see his throat muscles moving, you can only hear a faint whispering: it has been suggested that the notes of this song are pitched so high in the scale of sound that the human ear cannot hear them.

A morepork has other notes than the familiar "morepork." When making love he will settle himself on the same bough as his lady, making low, gurgling noises. He will gradually edge up to her, and she will edge away until she comes to the end of the bough, when she flies off to another perch. Whereat he will give a loud, indignant "More-pork!" as if to say, "Drat the woman, what's the matter with her!" and follow her and start again.

The time when the sheer joy of living rings out in the notes of the birds is when they greet the new day in their Dawn Chorus—I wonder if you feel that way when you are turned out in the morning!—but now, alas, the Dawn Chorus which at one time was one of the wonders of N.Z. is only heard in isolated parts, and then only as a ghost of its former self.



## Junior Along the Track Bay of Plenty

Another bird that has visited our place is the kereru or native pigeon. In 1945 two birds came, and in 1946 and 1947 one came, between August and December, staying for about three months.

It has a greeny-brown back, a touch of orange on the head, a greyish-brown tail, and a white chest. It is very tame.

The bird feeds on the puriri berries, the trees of which are about fifty feet high. Its call was a pigeon-like "Oo-oo!"—(I.R., 13 years.)

(2/6 will be sent for each item published under Junior "Along the Track." We would like you to give your age when you write, but we do not insist.)

### Juniors! Listen in to NATURE QUESTION SESSION

from 2 Y.A.

Every Wednesday at 5.15 p.m.

(Latter part of Children's Session)

Commencing Wed., May 3rd, 1950.

Send in Nature Questions to P.O. Box 631,  
Wellington, and have them answered over  
the air!



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