

Along the Track

NELSON.—On April 5th last I was staying about 6 miles from Nelson and during the morning set out to walk the 80 yards or so down to the gate. The pathway was closely bounded by a wire fence, and before I had covered a third of the distance there was a swoop and a flash, and a shining cuckoo perched close by on the wire. As I came up, it rose and perched a couple of yards further on, and so it did all the way to the letter box. It was a fascinating experience! Several times the bird was so close as to be almost touchable; and it was wonderfully marked, so brilliantly bronze green above, and so strongly and strangely barred across the underbody.—*Miss L. M. Hunter-Brown.*

[April 5th is unusually late for a shining cuckoo to be still in New Zealand and it was probably one of the occasional ones which stay behind and winter here.—Ed.]

AUCKLAND.—It has been very interesting watching a little family of pukekos at the edge of a raupo swamp in Northcote. After first noticing parent birds with four chicks at the outer edge of the raupo, we visited the scene weekly and were rewarded one day by seeing them being fed. Wading into the shallow edge, the parent birds would dig down vigorously at the roots. After working hard for quite a few minutes, they would manage to tear a piece of root off and bringing it to the surface, would walk to the more solid edge and tear small pieces off (apparently holding it down with one foot while doing this) and feeding the young chick who had been eagerly watching this procedure. He hastily swallowed each piece, standing by till the next tit-bit was ready.

In the meantime the other parent had managed to get quite a large piece, about 4 inches long, and the other chick followed his parent hastily to receive his portions. Only two chicks were seen this day and on subsequent visits, so we wondered if the others hid away after being fed or if the family was reduced by eels.

Now they are three-quarter grown and only occasionally seen when we go to visit them, but as it is quite a large swamp it affords them a good sized area to feed in.

They reminded us of the pictures of the notornis chicks with their black down and long legs. Next season we hope to see another family being fed and reared.—*A. and J.P.*

TAUPO—Morning meal to music.—Some years ago, I had the pleasure of a prolonged visit to the sanctuary, the Little Barrier Island, and while there, saw and heard something memorable and beautiful, a bellbird feeding its young. On a trellis-work outside my bedroom window, every morning, the mother bird brought her two tiny "chicks" always too early for me to see them arrive; what I heard first was the sweetest little bell-note imaginable, and there, within about four feet from my window, were a mother and two babies, the two tiny ones balancing carefully on the cross bars, and apparently practising baby bell notes while they waited for the mother's return with their dainty morsels. I could never decide what the particular provision was—it appeared to be mainly liquid, and it was amusing to see how carefully the mother served each in turn, pushing the greedy one—the boy, no doubt—gently aside when he tried to get more than his share. There being no danger from cats or disturbing humans, I had the pleasure of seeing this, day after day, until I suppose the small ones gained a certain amount of confidence—they got plumage fairly rapidly—and went with their mother to learn to forage for themselves.—*M.L.*

[An ornithologist to whom we referred this tells us that he has never heard young bellbirds utter any bell-note, but a competent observer tells us that he has frequently heard morning after morning a bellbird practising before breaking into song; upon each occasion three or four false starts would be made before the songster apparently felt attuned to go through the whole theme. The young birds must have left the nest and been already able to fly; the mother bird would not have "brought" them to the trellis.—Ed.]

STRATFORD.—I got back home near 7 p.m. after a long slow ride per passenger and goods train which left Taumarunui near 9.30 a.m. I do not like the express as it traverses the best part of the journey in darkness and it is impossible to see any of the country on the way. From No. 11 tunnel to Tangarakau the scenery is really magnificent, about the best I have seen anywhere in the North Island from a carriage window, a real riot of forest covered hills.—*M. I. Armstrong.*