

Junior Along the Track

Taurikura.—On Sunday, 12th October, while I was in the bush on Mt. Manaia I heard the breaking of twigs. On investigating I came within a yard of a kaka which I watched for about ten minutes. It was cracking open dead twigs with its beak and eating the insects inside. Later I was able to secure one of these twigs. Inside it I could see the tunnel made by a grub. The kaka was brown and when it flew the feathers took on a reddish tint. Its beak was grey and it called in a harsh voice.—*Ann Brooke, 12 years.*

Bulls.—The other day we went for a drive and I noticed a small pond with three adult kingfishers, also one young kingfisher. Its colour was a dull grey with black on the head. The adult bird dived and caught a tadpole and ate it, not giving any to the young bird, but made a screeching noise as much as to say "go and catch your own". The bird did so but dived in feet first. It caught a tadpole holding it very tightly while it was wriggling; it killed it by hitting it on a branch many times until it was dead. I thought this was a very clever way to kill its food. Then it made a screeching noise as much as to say "I am more clever than you thought I was". *Billy Homes, 12 years.*

[*The bird Billy describes as a young bird would probably have been a female; not really dull grey, but a duller green. Despatching prey by battering it on a branch or stone is the kingfisher's usual practice.—Ed.*]

Murchison.—Every spring as soon as the willows begin to show green, the pigeons come to our township. I have counted seventeen in the trees at the same time and they seem to be able to balance on the highest slender twig without any trouble. Later they feed on the plum tree tips and then the kowhais. The tuis and bellbirds arrive as soon as the flowering currant is out, and come right up to our verandah. Last week I saw a weka in the paddock next to our house; he was, as usual, very tame and curious about everything.—*Martin Conway, 12 years.*

Feilding.—One day as I was riding in our bush by our dam six fantails flew out and flittered round eating the insects and things that I had disturbed. Once before a fantail followed a fly into our house and often we have one in our school chapel. The dam that the fantails live at is a sort of Sanctuary because we keep it as a breeding ground for ducks. At duck shooting time many many ducks are found there and I am glad because I think the birds ought to have somewhere to go.—*Rosemary Hobson, 12 years.*

Himitangi.—I and some friends went for a six mile walk along the beach. On the way we had a most interesting time. Beautiful shells were in plentiful supply. I managed to get two double fan shells, that is a flat and curved fan joined together. We managed to see several black oystercatchers, nine godwits, a few shags, many black-fronted terns, and a rare fairy or little white tern. Also we observed many black-backed gulls and red-billed gulls. Amongst the dead washed up along the beach we found three blue penguins, a swan and an albatross.—*John Reynolds, 14 years.*

[*Weren't they white-fronted terns, John? Black-fronted terns are rare in the North Island. The white-fronted tern has a black head but a white front or forehead.—Ed.*]

Christchurch.—There is a big kowhai in front of our house, and when it was in bloom some tuis and pigeons came to suck the flowers and after about 2 minutes the pigeons started to chase away the tuis.—*John Moore, 12 years.*

Lichfield.—I thought some of the readers might be interested in reading of a morepork's nest I found. I was playing in our trees one day when suddenly a morepork flew out of a hollow pine tree in front of me. It flew a few yards and then perched on the branch of a wattle tree. I hurried over to the tree and found on the far side a large hole which opened up into a large cavern about the size of a basket ball. The floor of the nest was made of rotten wood and in a little hollow there were lying two pure white eggs. I found the nest at the end of October.—*Brian Spraggon, 13 years.*

[*Owing to something he has read Brian thinks that was unusually early. Actually it was not; the morepork nests in spring and early summer.—Ed.*]

Roto-o-rangi.—One day when I was walking through the pond I found two pukeko nests. I was very interested in one of them because it had nine eggs in it. The nest was on a cutty-grass stump. The nest was the same as any other nest except that the eggs were arranged with five eggs on the bottom and four on top.—*Patrick Dillon, 11 years.*

[*The number of eggs was not unusual but their position was. They are generally on one level.—Ed.*]

Karamea.—Over at our cow shed, we have a tame weka which has lost the claws of one foot. It loves the curds we put out for it, and it is nearly always waiting. One day we saw that he and his mate had a nest, for following him were some little chicks. Besides living in the bush, they are often seen in a large blackberry bush near our pigstys. We call our weka "Hoppy" because of his leg, which was caught in an opossum trap.—*Helen Tunnichiff, 12 years.*

Manaia.—Recently I had the experience of watching a blackbird. It wasn't an ordinary blackbird, it had a white head. The other blackbirds seemed to stare at it. It had a yellow beak, and yellow legs just like the other blackbirds. Could you explain to me the cause of it having white on it. I have heard of another blackbird all white with one black wing.—*Lance Smith, 16 years.*

Marton.—As I was lying in bed in the morning I saw a male blackbird just outside its nest. It had white patches on its wings. I am quite sure it was a blackbird as I looked it up and it was the same in every detail except the wings.—*Andrew McCall, 10 years.*

Patutahi.—Recently, while we were having tea, my sister noticed a white bird at the end of the garden. As we live in the country we do not see many sea-birds. But upon investigating we found it was totally unlike a seagull or anything of its kind. We have heard of albino blackbirds and have since come to the conclusion that that is what it was. It was very like a blackbird in shape though it seemed thinner and longer.—*Elizabeth Williams, 16 years.*

[*What Lance Smith, Andrew McCall and Elizabeth Williams saw is not uncommon. It is caused by a lack of pigment or colour developing in certain areas of feathers; it very often crops out in the descendants of a bird so marked.—Ed.*]