

A SAD LITTLE TALE

You must often have wondered how and why some of our native birds are dying out.

In his *Bird Life on Island and Shore* Mr. Guthrie-Smith tells how, while he and a friend were visiting Little Barrier Island, they watched two North Island robins for some weeks.

The robins began courting early in October and Mr. Robin could be seen offering his lady a choice worm or a juicy caterpillar, which she would accept with a grateful flutter of wings.

Then began nest building. This was a process which needed much care in the choice of materials, and Mrs. Robin would carefully test each aerial root before pulling it from the tree-trunk.

Nothing but the best and strongest would do for her precious nest. She was a marvel of skill as she gathered the needed material. A cobwebby tangle of twigs always appealed to her, and she even managed to pull towards her nest a yard-long train of twigs, leaves and cobweb, cleverly steering it through the undergrowth.

To shape the nest, at times she would get inside and, after weaving the material with her beak, she would press with her body to get the right shape, turning in a half-circle first to one side and then to the other. Finally she would spread her wings and beat them down on the rim of the nest to give it a neat finish.

Her little husband, meanwhile, gathered food for both of them, and would call her a short distance from the nest and offer her grubs and caterpillars.

By 19th October some eggs had been laid, though Mr. Guthrie-Smith says he did not go near the nest for fear of disturbing the birds. One day this nest was destroyed by rats.

A second nest was soon built by the robins, but rats ate those eggs too.

On 23rd November a third nest was found and the eggs were hatched, but this time fate was even more unkind because the gentle, hard-working little mother was killed by the rats and the babies taken.

Mr. Guthrie-Smith describes how for weeks afterwards he used to see the lonely little male bird still near the same spot, as though unable to tear himself away.

Junior Along the Track

TE AWAMUTU.—Some time ago when I had the chickenpox my father brought in a small shining cuckoo that he had found on the tanker track dead. My big brother had seen one before in our orchard. At first we didn't know what kind of bird it was until my big brother had got home from school and said that it was a shining cuckoo. One other time when our flax bush was in flower a tui came and got all the nectar out of the flowers, but some naughty minahs used to chase it away, but sometimes it came back and my big brother was lucky to get a photo of it.—**S. J. Meddings** (10 years).

PUKEHINA.—One day while I was coming along the canal near our home with the mail, I noticed a wild duck swimming upstream. As I didn't think she had noticed me, I lay down behind some lupins which were in flower and stalked her for about 300 yards up the canal. Every now and then I could hear the noise of baby ducklings, and as I heard this noise I also noticed that mother duck's head was turned in the opposite direction. Then all of a sudden, the mother duck flew up and away. I listened and watched carefully and heard the ducklings again. I saw the duck's mouth going up and down, too, so I then learned that I had been tricked and that the mother duck was playing the game of "baby ducklings" herself. I felt a bit ashamed of myself after that and shall practise stalking until I am an expert. Even though I have my bad luck I did manage to stalk a banded dotterel on the beach. We also have a very tame fantail that comes into the kitchen nearly every morning.—**Moreen White** (13 years).

NEW PLYMOUTH.—During the August holidays an outing was organised for all children who wished to come. They met at the Museum and after being sorted into groups, six to eight adult members of the Taranaki Branch showed them around. Over seventy were waiting before the doors opened at 9.45 a.m. About 100 more were there by 10 a.m.

Country children were shown over the Museum and parts of the city. Other groups went to the sea shore, local parks, and other places of interest. The groups, being arranged according to school classes, enjoyed themselves. Sightseeing was continued in the afternoon with still more newcomers.

I am sure the children appreciated the attention given to them, because a few of the adults showing them around had the satisfaction of several children coming back and saying "Thank you".

Many children interested were given membership forms. So we expect a lot of new members.—**Paula Collins**.

NEW PLYMOUTH.—At our back door we have a beautiful kowhai tree which is a mass of flowers and about fourteen feet high. It is fascinating to watch the tuis swoop down and suck the nectar from the yellow bell-shaped flowers with its brush-like tongue. I think the tui is a very pretty bird, and it has many peculiar ways. While the tui is sitting on her eggs she sings. Not many birds do this. Our kowhai tree is about 12 years old. When my sister planted the tree it was about 1 ft. high and ever since it was about 5ft. high it has flowered every season. We have two near our