

*Dunedin*—While spending a holiday at Queenstown I had the time to study some black-billed gulls. I noticed that they were identical except for the colouring of their eyes. Some of these gulls had black eyes and some had white with a small red ring in the centre. To observe them I made a "hide" in the rocks and took a photograph of them, encouraging them with bread. After some time I realised that the birds with brown on their feathers (which are immature birds) had the black eyes and as I was feeding a lame one off my hand I noticed that faintly in the middle of the black eye there was a dark ring. I came to the conclusion that when the young birds have black eyes and adult plumage, they are about two years old, and as they grow older their eyes become ringed.—*Stephen McElrea, 12 years.*

[Your careful observation is of great interest. The young birds, as you say, have darker eyes and become lighter as the birds grow older, but the change over is between the end of the first year and the middle of the second, that is when the birds are about eighteen months old.—Ed.]

*Christchurch*—During the August holidays my mother, sister, and I were staying at our bach on the New Brighton sandspit when we noticed a lark, continually landing and taking off, on our property, not far from where we were sitting in our doorway. My mother said it must be feeding its young, so when it was away we quietly searched for its nest, time and time again. At last we found it, well hidden under a clump of grass. We had to lift up the overhanging grass to see in, and there, in what was almost a tunnel, were four baby larks, still in the down. We were most careful not to disturb them and left at once. When we looked a fortnight later they had gone.—*Mary Williams, 13 years.*

*New Plymouth*—I have sent a list of birds I have observed round the New Plymouth district. In Pukekura Park there are tuis, ducks by the score, bellbirds, and wood pigeons, as well as mynahs, blackbirds, sparrows, thrushes, and other common birds. At the back of Paritutu Rock there are white-fronted terns, and black-backed and red-billed gulls, and I have found a blue penguin washed up at Hawaroa (New Plymouth). Out by Egmount Road there are pied stilts (eight or nine) and a few ducks on a small pond. Out towards the coast there are pukekos, quails, kingfishers, harriers, pheasants, goldfinches, banded dotterels, magpies, moreporks and waxeyes.—*Tony Nielsen.*

*Butler*—Our house is two miles from Westport, at Carter's Beach. It is a wonderful place for bird watching as we have a beach a quarter of a mile away, a swamp next to the house, some bush by the side of the farm, and a lake in our neighbour's farm. I see a large number of birds: fantails, waxeyes, chaffinches, yellowhammers, thrushes, tuis, bellbirds, native pigeons, shining cuckoos, wekas, pukekos, wild ducks, moreporks, seagulls of all kinds, and all the more common birds such as starlings. I have seen one or two white herons in the bird sanctuary one mile from our place in a lagoon. Bitterns are often seen and are gradually increasing, but aren't seen as much as the pukekos and their young. So I see many birds of different sorts when I go wandering through the bush with the farm dog.—*Raymond Bruning, 14 years.*

*Rotorua*—While visiting Te Mahoe I saw a native wood pigeon, the first one I ever saw. In the bush I saw tuis, fantails, and bellbirds. Going over we saw a white hawk. We wonder what type it was.—*Wayne Miller, 10 years.*

[Probably an old male (native) harrier hawk.]

*Summer*—Sometimes a thrush comes on to our lawn. He is here today and Mummy and I watched it through the kitchen window. He puts his head down and cocks it on one side; then when he hears a worm under the grass he quickly put in his beak and pulls it out and swallows it. He does not always get a worm but he always tries again. He has just got a large bundle of worms in his beak and I think he must have some chicks somewhere. We have a lot of trees around the house and we get sparrows, blackbirds, starlings, thrushes, waxeyes, and sometimes bullfinches and goldfinches.—*Jane Leeburn, 10 years.*

*Christchurch*—One day we went over to Pigeon Bay to cut gorse. As I entered the bush there I caught a glimpse of a few manuka still in flower. It was in the bush; the only sound was of the swishing of the stream, and bellbirds calling. The track I was following soon came to an end, and I had to force a way through the bush, slipping and sliding and grasping hold of roots of trees to haul myself up to level ground. I was about to cross the creek when a continuous chirping broke out in some bushes near me. At first I thought it was made by crickets, but an investigation yielded a pair of riflemen searching for insects among the branches. After crossing the creek I startled a tui two or three feet away from me. Before it flew away I had a chance to study its greeny-blue plumage and the tuft of feathers on the throat. I was amazed at its size. The rifleman's chirping was almost unending, and up in the tree-tops brown creepers were moving about in small flocks, stopping at intervals to feed their young. My attention was focused on a male rifleman who, with an insect in his bill, flew to a gorse bush. Reappearing a few seconds later, and flying back into the bush, he repeated this twice. I knew they had a nest there, but I did not intrude for fear of disturbing the birds. I think the rifleman doesn't mind gorse thickets. As I walked up the cut-over gorse to join the rest of the party I disturbed two Californian quail who ran chuckling into some manuka bushes. Later I saw a pigeon and a tui fly over. On previous trips, I have seen a shining cuckoo and a South Island tomtit; also down at the bay there are penguins and shags.—*Barry Ashworth.*

*Hutt*—Around the Hutt Valley there are a number of birds, tuis, shining cuckoos, long-tailed cuckoos, fantails, wood pigeons, gulls, warblers, pukekos, bitterns, chaffinches, waxeyes, sparrows, blackbirds, and thrushes. Sometimes you can see grey ducks at the swamp. I have seen only one shining cuckoo and that was at a swamp at the river. At the swamp there are a lot of nests in the willows, and many frogs can be heard croaking in the summer. At night you can hear moreporks.—*Nigel Hooper, 10 years.*

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