

Hebe insularis is a very soft twiggy type of veronica, usually inclined to be sprawly. It grows down the cliff ledges, on the scree, and on the collar just above the cliffs. It was in full bloom at the time of our visit; the flowers are a pale lilac in terminal clusters not unlike those of *Hebe diosmifolia*. I came on one plant with an unusual growth form; it was a very handsome little compact round clump about three feet high and wide.

The creeping fern, *Davallia tasmani*, which clammers through rock crevices and is also present through the manuka, is a pleasing little fern.

We now come to one of the two gems of the Great King. *Tecomanthe speciosa* was located with little difficulty growing on a stream bank in Tasman Valley. All accounts I have read concerning this climber have stated that only one vine existed. This however, is not correct; there is a group of four separate flourishing vines, which may have and probably did come from the largest vine originally.

Plectomirtha baylisiana, the one and only known tree, this we failed to locate. It was our only disappointment. We spent a good while looking for it in the vicinity of the locality given but without results.

A creeping plant not commonly met in the vicinity of the sea on the northern mainland is the native cucumber (*Sicyos angulata*), but it is quite common on both Great King and South-West King, in fact too common. Its ripe seed burrs are a real nuisance if one happens to push past an unnoticed vine. The segments of the burrs immediately cling to your clothing, as does the pipiriri (bidi-bidi), but the difference is that the cucumber has very thin, sharp, brittle, irritating thorns.

A herb which must have been practically wiped out by the goats but which is now abundant is the oru (*Pratia physaloides*). In parts of the Tasman Valley it forms masses of soft green.

The Birds of Great King

Very little evidence of Maori occupation remains. With the rapid regeneration over the past sixteen years the ground for the most part is completely covered. Bellbirds, which I consider represent not less than 50 per cent. of the land birds on the island, are a very cheerful lot. From sunrise till sunset, not before or after, their singing and chirping can be

heard through the day, especially in the vicinity of the streams. The beautiful red-fronted parakeets come next after bellbirds in numbers, which would be roughly equal to that of all the other native birds.

As for the rest of the native land birds on the island, it was most disappointing. They were for the most part absent. The pipit was seen on several occasions in the more open places, three fantails only were seen, also several kingfishers (and a nest hole in a bank which showed definite signs of a family having been successfully reared in it), and one silver-eye. A pair of harrier hawks and some single birds were often seen in flight, and a hawk's nest of this season was also found, the usual platform of sticks and twigs. Moreporks were fairly common; two pretty little fluffy slate-grey young were seen sitting in a low tree close to one of the parents.

Little brown quail were flushed on several occasions. To my knowledge these have not yet been conclusively identified as being either the Australian quail common on the mainland, or the once plentiful but now considered extinct native quail.

No tuis, pigeons, or grey warblers were seen or heard. Of the introduced birds, a blackbird was heard singing on two mornings just after dawn and a nest of this season was found, four starlings flew over on 1 January, and a chaffinch was heard singing several times about noon on the same day. The red-billed gull was nesting literally by the thousand all around the shore line. From just above sea level right to the tops of the cliffs, there were odd chicks about a third grown, but most of the nests contained eggs and chicks just hatched. A sooty shearwater chick was found under a sheet of iron, part of the remains of the castaway depot. A number of petrel burrows were seen but not investigated. At night calls of sea birds flying over were frequently heard.

The first of the native birds to be heard of a morning were the parakeets. Their chatter would commence at 5.10 a.m. and at 5.20 a.m. the bellbirds would begin to sing, this coinciding with sunrise. I was surprised that they did not tune up earlier, but perhaps the reason is that the morepork is fairly common and might hunt till about sunrise.