

ALONG THE TRACK

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Mangamahū.—About two days ago I saw an old nest up in a willow tree overhanging the river. The next day I saw that it was occupied by a pair of magpies. I have never seen this before, as most birds build a new nest every year and I was wondering if you could please explain this strange phenomenon.

About three miles from home the road runs between native bush and the river. One day as I biked along the road I saw five or six native wood-pigeons sitting in the willow trees bordering the river. One that was perched in a white pine was facing towards the road and I saw a white patch out of the corner of my eye and turned round to see a pigeon sitting in the tree. I had seen its white breast.

In the native bush where the pigeons are there are many young white pines 20-30 ft. high and they look very pretty with their green leaves and easily seen whitish bark. This bush extends right back over the hills and joins another not a mile from where the pigeons are. In the second bush there grows the largest white pine I have ever seen. It stands about 40-50 ft. high and is about 3 ft. 6 in. through the base of the trunk. Also in this bush there is much moss, all various shades of green. One species looks like green seaweed.

—Kelvin Hainsworth, 11 years.

Several birds will re-use a nest of their own or of another species, but your observation of magpies is unusual and very interesting.—Ed.

Te Kuiti.—It was at St. Stephen's School that I found a young thrush on the ground without a tail. He seemed to realise that he shouldn't fly away until his tail had grown. The first morning he ate four worms and some pieces of bread and meat. Of course he could flutter from place to place, but he could not guide himself. At one angle I could see right through his two nostrils. When you whistled at him he stretched his neck out to breaking point and was very interested. He would chirp back at you, and then all of a sudden fly on to your head or shoulder. I let him go when his tail had grown sufficiently.

—T. Morgan, 14 years.

Grahams Beach.—Recently Dad told me that he had taken out at least seven kingfishers from our troughs. The troughs had been sprayed with bloat cure, which was floating on top of the water. The bloat cure had obviously got on to the bills and into the nostrils so that they couldn't breathe. This may be one way of saving one of our native birds, the kingfisher, by advocating to the farmers not to put bloat cure on troughs. We thought we only had one kingfisher on our farm. We didn't know they were so common.

—Jane Andrews, 12 years.

Ohope.—The first reports of shining cuckoos heard in this district were from Hikutaia Domain, Opotiki, on 27 September and at Hillcress, Whakataane on 28 September. I collect fungus and have found about fifty-two different specimens. Yesterday I found a whole lot of 'Lorchel' in the bush quite near our house. The cap is up to 3 in. tall, light brown wavy folds. It is hard to find and poisonous. We went for a walk up a lonely creek and saw what we think were two native rats. They were in high branches of a willow tree which is growing in the bush. Their colour was light brown and I could see their ears were pointed. I am sure they were nibbling the willow shoots.

—Trina Brown, 9 years.

The rats were probably the introduced ones, as native rats are not thought to leave the ground or eat vegetation.—Ed.

Dannevirke.—One night at about 5 o'clock I watched an emperor moth come out of its cocoon. I collected it off a pepper tree, though my first cocoon came off a blue gum tree. The moths were both the same except that the moth off the pepper tree was slightly darker.

I went into my bedroom and heard clicking noises coming from the cupboard in which I kept the cocoon. I looked into the cupboard and saw a piece of the cocoon was moving in and out. After about half an hour there were only a few fibres left and I could see something moving inside the cocoon. The cocoon now had a hole in it, which had been made by a piece of hard, flat, dark-orange scale on the back of the moth's head. The moth then crawled half way out, but the hole wasn't big enough. He cut a little more away and came out. His wings were small and shrivelled up, but they soon grew. This whole operation took about two hours. This is a very beautiful moth; it is pink and has a wing span of 4 in. There are circular markings on the wings and it has large fern-like feelers.

—Chris Ginders, 10 years.

Palmerston North.—On Sunday we went to Moanaroa Beach, where there was a terrible wind and found a seagull's nest with three eggs in it. Then we came to more nests with three eggs in them, but the last nest only had two eggs in it. Lynley found three darling baby seagulls. The eggs were light green and light grey. The baby seagulls were light grey.

—Shirley Ottervanger, 8 years.

How interesting to see the nests and the baby birds. You did not touch the eggs, did you? Because the parents don't like their eggs to be picked up or their nests to be handled.—Ed.

Kaiapoi.—We have four black swans, 16 Canadian geese, five pairs of pheasants, and 52 guinea pigs, which I myself look after. Last year I went to one of your evenings in the museum lecture theatre, and was shown some coloured slides of very pretty birds of the native bush. It was very interesting.

—Brian Grofski, 12 years.