

a network of well-marked tracks leading to a great variety of habitats.*

Variety in habitat is reflected by variety in birdlife, and, indeed, all but a few of the 56 species identified during the 3-week stay were seen on foot excursions from Oban. Even within the Turner Cottage section tuis and bellbirds fed regularly on the nectar of native fuchsia, and wekas crept stealthily looking for scraps, the refuse pit being a regular visiting place.

Other visitors to the section included house and hedge sparrows, goldfinches, greenfinches, chaffinches, and starlings, and additional introduced species—yellowhammer, skylark, and redpoll—were commonly to be found in suitable habitats in the neighbourhood. The redpoll, in particular, is very abundant throughout Stewart Island wherever there is open ground; its trilling flight call is one of the most characteristic bird sounds. The native pigeon, too, was numerous around the settlement at this time of year, feeding on the colourful broom and gorse flowers.

Chattering Parakeets

Chattering of red-crowned parakeets is a typical sound of the bush walks, and the birds may be seen occasionally as they forage in the bush canopy or fly across a clearing. Another bird which usually advertises its presence by a well-known call, the shining cuckoo, may also be glimpsed as it dashes from one piece of cover to another. The small native bush birds, fantail, grey warbler, yellow-breasted tomtit, and white-eye, are easily seen, especially if attracted with a medicine bottle "squeaker".†

Each evening, as the sun sinks behind Mount Rakeahua, the skies are filled with the shrill pre-roosting screams and whistles of kakas, interspersed with the repetitive "shweest" of the long-tailed cuckoo. Blackbird and song thrush contribute to the twilight chorus until dusk finally descends and the morepork begins his limited nocturnal repertoire.

* See Lands and Survey map N.Z.M.S. 219, Stewart Island.

† See FOREST AND BIRD, November 1971, "Birds of the New Zealand Bush".

Observing at Night

Evening is definitely not the time to conclude a day's bird-watching on Stewart Island. By leaving Halfmoon Bay as dusk falls and following the track out to Ackers Point (with the aid of a good torch) the observer can reach the lighthouse promontory at the end of the peninsula just as the muttonbirds (sooty shearwaters) arrive at their small colony there.

The strange cooing cries of the shearwaters circling round the headland evoke similar responses from those already in their burrows until sky and ground alike are resounding with the din. From time to time a bird may be heard landing as it crashes its way through the vegetation.

After a while the muttonbird activity quiets down and, instead, every 15 seconds as the lighthouse flashes, pale ghost-like forms are momentarily revealed in the darkness as they approach the headland from the sea. These forms prove to be prions, which with a little practice can be held in a torch beam as they circle and twist through the air until they flutter, confused, to one's feet. All the birds caught in this way were fairy prions, though remains of both fairy and broad-billed prions were found scattered about the headland. It was not possible to determine beyond question whether either species breeds here, but it seems possible.

Peculiar Braying Call

During one dark night a peculiar braying call could be heard coming intermittently from the rocks at the foot of the headland. By clambering down to sea level and carefully searching among the rocks and crevices, I eventually found a Fiordland crested penguin to be responsible as it stood at the entrance of what was presumed to be a nesting cavern. This finding may be an indication that the crested penguin is extending its breeding range, as it has been considered to be restricted on Stewart Island to the west coast.*

The much smaller little blue penguins also breed in the vicinity in great numbers. Their wailing courtship cries can be heard from water's edge to high in the bush, and their nests may be easily discovered in burrows or under logs and tree roots. On a walk back

* See "A Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand" by Falla, Sibson, and Turbott.