

to form the South-west Arm at the base of Mount Rakeahua and then continuing on foot.

The round trip from Oban, through South-west Arm, Doughboy and Mason Bays, Freshwater River, and North-west Arm, with assistance by boat only to South-west Arm, and allowing time for bird-watching, took 4 days. The tracks through the interior were freshly cut and marked by the New Zealand Forest Service and the weather was dry and sunny; under wet conditions the time needed could be considerably extended. Forest Service huts provide excellent shelter, but as there are not many, it is wise to take a tent.

The track from South-west Arm crosses extensive areas of lowland manuka scrub before rising through the forested hillsides and emerging eventually above the bushline where stunted manuka and tussock dominate the vegetation. The song of the Stewart Island robin may be heard from time to time through the dense lowland manuka, but nowhere is it common. The robin is most unlikely to be seen without the aid of a "squeaker", to which it is attracted readily. The hillside forest furnished no additional species to those already described, but the possibility of locating an undetected population of kokako or yellowhead cannot be dismissed.

Habitat of Fernbird

The high wind-swept hilltops with their stunted manuka and eroded tussock are the habitat of the fernbird and the breeding grounds of the New Zealand dotterel. Like the robin, the fernbird is usually detected by its call, and though extremely secretive, it will often emerge temporarily from its cover to see who is passing by. The dotterel, on the other hand, takes great trouble to advertise itself, particularly if the path of the trampler should transgress a breeding territory. Then both the male and female dotterel perform an elaborate "broken wing" distraction display, in which intruders are beguiled into following the adults away from eggs or chicks. The birds allow close approach and, with care, some detailed observations may be made of this attractive species.

The route to Mason Bay descends through further stands of forest until the vast area of sand dunes behind the bay is reached. Among the dunes, and on the beds of the

creeks that cut through them, New Zealand pipit, banded dotterel, and paradise duck can be found and where the fresh water from the creeks fans out into a delta on meeting the sea, some black-billed gulls feed and bathe with red-billed gulls. The southern arm of the 8-mile Mason Bay is formed by a rocky headland and from this vantage point the courtship and nesting behaviour of a sizeable colony of white-fronted terns may be observed. Small flocks of terns may also be seen fishing out to sea, frequently in association with crested penguins.

Biggest Reward

Perhaps the biggest reward for the arduous tramp right across Stewart Island is the opportunity to see a kiwi. Evidence of the Stewart Island kiwi (known locally as the tokoeke) is provided in daylight by the extensive network of tracks left criss-crossing the sand dunes. At night the birds' shrill cries, rising in semitones, may be heard penetrating the darkness.

A kiwi can be seen without difficulty by walking along the top of the beach with a torch. When found, a kiwi shows no fear of the torchlight and, indeed, gives no indication that it is even aware of it. A really close approach may therefore be made as it plods along at a steady pace, probing in the sand to the left and right with its long, sensitive bill.

These are the birds that were observed on Stewart Island during a family holiday. One cannot, of course, expect to see all the birds of a particular locality during a single visit. For example, opportunity did not provide in this instance for observation of several species of mollymawks, petrels, and other sea birds. Nevertheless, by good use of the hours of daylight, and a few of the darkness as well, the visitor can record a representative selection of the varied birdlife of Stewart Island in a fairly short stay.

Acknowledgments

Without the forbearance of my wife and the assistance of Mr Roy Traill, Dr Hunter, and New Zealand Forest Service rangers I would have had several fewer species to describe in this article.