

kotuku finds the estuary water a good feeding ground in winter.

Good Place To See Birds

About 20 miles north of Wellington are Porirua Harbour and Pauatahanui Inlet. The inlet is a good place to see birds, as it has a good road almost all the way around it and this has made the birds used to modern traffic. They take no notice of a parked car and so you can easily get ideal bird watching on a windy day.

Among the big birds, which are easier to see, there are black swans and many ducks (mostly mallard and a stray Canada goose; he probably came up from the South Island on a southerly gale and cannot find his way back again). On a partly submerged log three or four black shags dry their wings, and a group of white-throated or "little" shags occupy a line of telephone posts across one bay; they are always there, perhaps "listening in" on the local gossip.

There are white-faced herons wading in the shallows and a group of half a dozen stilts nervously calling to one another. A Caspian tern patrols the estuary, diving in for his food and coming up with a little herring gripped in his large red bill.



White-faced heron.

Kingfishers sit on vantage points and swoop down when something moves on the mud.

There is an area raised slightly above the mud flats which used to be a "go-cart" track, but was later excavated for the Kapuni natural gas pipeline. This area is a favourite place for banded dotterels, and a small group can be seen poking about among the shell debris and wet areas. They are always on the move, quickly running to have a look at a likely food morsel or when disturbed flying strongly to a less occupied place. Plump and solid little birds they are, with a couple of chestnut bands across their breasts.

You will see, therefore, that there is a collection of birds each filling his place in an ecological pattern.



Pied stilt.

Reclaimed Area

The Pauatahanui Inlet is an arm of Porirua Harbour, and at the southern end of the harbour there has been extensive reclamation and filling. This reclaimed area will soon be used for light industry. With modern town planning it could be an attractive locality with an interesting beach frontage and wading birds and sea birds to look at, or it could become the handy dumping ground for building or engineering left-overs.

In the first two or three articles of this series black and white drawings were included, but this practice was not continued with later articles. Sometimes we are short of space, but usually we lacked an artist. However, if you want to sketch a locality and have insufficient time or ability to draw birds, symbols can be used; provided you always use the same "key", it is a much quicker way to draw. Sometimes speed is essential; there may be something obviously going to disturb your birds—a boat, a dog, or a person walking. In a minute all your birds are recorded on a rough sketch.



Southern pied oystercatchers.