

ART. XXXIII.—Notes on some Species of New Zealand Birds.

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Communicated by Sir Walter Buller.

[Read before the Wellington Philosophical Society, 21st August, 1895.]

Harrier (*Circus gouldi*, Bonap.).

The harrier is the most plentiful and generally-distributed species of rapacious bird in this district, appearing to be as equally at home on the settler's clearing as when coursing over the wide tussocky uplands on the back-stations. Of late years it has sensibly diminished, partly owing to the depredations of rabbiters, who seem to make a general practice of exterminating all birds that may unwarily frequent their preserves, in order to protect their own particular quarry.

An instance illustrative of the acute olfactory sense of this species came under my notice about two years ago. A gentleman of my acquaintance, who was experimenting with a new process of rabbit-trapping on a station near Blenheim, placed a dozen rabbits in the station woolshed, intending to forward them to the rabbit-factory the succeeding morning. Illness, however, prevented him from visiting the locality for a few days, when he perceived the roof of the shed, over the part where the rabbits were hanging, crowded with harriers, vulture-like, silently waiting for their prey.

Sparrow-hawk (*Hieracidea novæ-zealandiæ*, Lath.); **Bush-hawk** (*H. ferox*, Peale).

Both tolerably numerous.

Morepork (*Spiloglaux novæ-zealandiæ*, Gml.).

Common; an occasional specimen may often be heard quite close to town. Some time ago one was caught while attempting to capture a caged goldfinch hanging under a verandah here.

Dollar-bird (*Eurystomus pacificus*, Lath.).

An occasional straggler from Australia.

Kingfisher (*Halcyon vagans*, Lesson).

This splendidly-coloured bird may be regarded as one of our commonest birds, being generally found in all suitable localities throughout the province. During the autumn and winter months they congregate in considerable numbers;

twenty or thirty specimens may often be noticed within quite a small radius.

Parson-bird (*Prothemadera novæ-zealandiæ*, Gml.).

A rapidly-diminishing species.

Bell-bird (*Anthornis melanura*, Sparrm.).

The bell-bird, familiarly called the "mocker," still holds its own, and is to be met with in most unlikely places, frequenting alike the scant open scrub and *Phormium* along the sea-shore, and blind gullies winding amid arid hills, as well as the virgin bush. Along the bridle-track leading from Picton to the Grove, during the Easter of 1894, it was particularly abundant—the bush seemed to swarm with them; but upon reaching the Mahakipawa goldfields, but a few miles distant, the following day, none were observed. A nest now in my possession was found built in and over that of a song-thrush (*T. musicus*).

Blight-bird (*Zosterops lateralis*, Lath.).

Very common.

Bush-wren (*Xenicus longipes*, Gml.); **Rock-wren** (*X. gilviventris*, Pelz).

Both species are now principally restricted to the back-ranges, the former predominating.

Rifleman (*Acanthidositta chloris*, Sparrm.).

Numerous in the Sounds district.

Yellow-head Canary (*Orthonyx ochrocephala*).

Common, though never associated together in large flocks.

Fern-bird (*Sphenæacus fulvus*, Gray).

Seldom obtained.

Grey Warbler (*Gerygone flaviventris*, Gray).

Very common; frequenting the gardens and hedgerows during the winter months.

Brown Creeper (*Certhiparus novæ-zealandiæ*, Gml.).

Common.

Yellow-breasted Tit (*Petroica macrocephala*, Gml.); **South Island Wood-robin** (*P. albifrons*, Gml.).

Both very common.

Ground-lark (*Anthus novæ-zealandiæ*, Gml.).

The introduction of ground-vermin and the laying of poisoned grain for small birds are the factors largely responsible

for the rapid diminution of this bird during recent years. It is, however, to be met with in considerable numbers in many localities—more especially in the Awatere district; and I have noticed in Picton several small flocks running along the grass-covered streets of that prettily-situated seaport town.

Pied Fantail (*Rhipidura flabellifera*, Gml.); **Black Fantail** (*R. fuliginosa*, Sparrm.).

Common; the former species occurs in the ratio of six to one of the latter. I have seen an albino, having a wing pure white, the remaining plumage being of the ordinary colouring.

Orange-wattled Crow (*Glaucoptis cinerea*, Gml.).

Occurs in the neighbourhood of Mount Riley.

Saddleback (*Creedion carunculatus*, Gml.).

The range of the saddleback is yearly becoming more circumscribed, and it is now confined to a few out-of-way localities, such as Tophouse, on the road to Nelson, and the Sounds district, where it is rare and widely distributed.

Red-fronted Parrakeet (*Platycercus novæ-zealandiæ*, Sparrm.); **Yellow-fronted Parrakeet** (*P. auriceps*, Kuhl); **Orange-fronted Parrakeet** (*P. alpinus*, Buller); **Lesser Red-fronted Parrakeet** (*P. rowleyi*, Buller).

The red-fronted bird is the most plentiful, being generally to be met with in all suitable localities. During the year 1888, the year of the unprecedented invasion of native rats, hundreds of parrakeets, particularly the first two species, haunted the neighbourhood of the villages adjacent to the bush and made themselves obnoxious to orchardists, in many instances entirely stripping the trees of their fruit.

In caged specimens of *P. alpinus* the articulation is very indistinct.

Brown Parrot (*Nestor meridionalis*, Gml.).

The kaka was at one time very abundant. A spot was lately pointed out to me along the road to Picton where in former days the natives camped for weeks in order to snare them for winter consumption, where now, alas! not one is to be found within many miles.

Long-tailed Cuckoo (*Eudynamis taitensis*, Sparrm.); **Shining Cuckoo** (*Chrysococcyx lucidus*, Gml.).

The first visitants herald their arrival about the third week in October; and during the latter part of November and December, when the main body appears, they are very plentiful, numbers frequenting the plantations near town, depending principally for their means of subsistence upon their persistent

robbery of the nests containing eggs and young of several species of acclimatised birds. The latest record of their occurrence is 26th March.

Owing to its general resemblance at a distance to the greenfinch (*C. chloris*) the shining cuckoo is, I believe, in numberless instances mistaken for that species. Comparatively few people here seem to be acquainted with it, though very common.

Wood-pigeon (*Carpophaga novæ-zealandiæ*, Gml.).

Irregularly distributed; albinos are often shot.

South Island Kiwi (*Apteryx australis*, Shaw); **Grey Kiwi** (*A. oweni*, Gould).

Both species have now become very rare. Individuals of the latter species are now confined to the high precipitous hills bordering Cook Strait, notably Port Underwood, from where a few are occasionally procured. The back ranges of the Wairau Valley, the Wakamarina, Mahakipawa, and Waikakaho Goldfields, as well as portions of forest-country within the confines of the Queen Charlotte, Pelorus, and Kenepuru Sounds, are the haunts of the main remnant.

Eastern Golden Plover (*Charadrius fulvus*, Gml.).

A specimen was shot at the Wairau bar early in January. I heard the particulars of its capture some days after it was shot, and endeavoured to secure it, but the shooter had in the meantime eaten the body, no doubt with satisfaction to himself, but giving me cause for regret, as I do not possess a specimen.

Dottrel (*Charadrius bicinctus*, Jard.).

The dottrel is very numerous along the sandy shores of the southern portions of the province, but rare in the Sounds. Throughout the year considerable numbers habitually frequent the river-beds and stony pastures far inland. While crossing the Taylor River-bed on horseback one evening I noticed a dottrel flying along, as if wounded, a few yards in advance of a retriever; the dog entered into the chase with spirit, coursing up and down the river-bed until it seemed perfectly tired, and was returning to the road again when the dottrel, observing the direction it was taking, flew again in front of it and repeated its antics, until, having, no doubt, betrayed it past the spot where its eggs or young were concealed, it mounted high in the air and wheeled back again.

Crook-bill Plover (*Anarhynchus frontalis*, Quoy et Gaim.).

Resorts to the mud-flats at the Wairau bar, and I have also met with it on the Awatere and Spring Creek river-beds.

Pied Oyster-catcher (*Hematopus longirostris*, Vieill.); **Black Oyster-catcher** (*H. unicolor*, Forst.).

Both frequent the extensive mud-flats in various parts of the Sounds, marshy situations far inland as well as round the coasts; they are very plentiful at Port Underwood.

White Heron (*Ardea alba*, L.); **White-fronted Heron** (*A. novæ-hollandiæ*, Lath.); **Blue Heron** (*A. sacra*, Gml.).

The white heron, or crane as it is generally called locally, is, owing to its conspicuous appearance, the most generally heard-of species. Of late several specimens have been obtained; the last one—a remarkably fine bird—I saw mounted in a window here was obtained at the Wairau Pa by a native. Individuals oftentimes haunt for a considerable time the mud-flats at the junction of the Opawa and Wairau Rivers and their adjacent lagoons, and generally manage to elude capture. My father observed a beautiful specimen some years ago perched on the topmost bough of a weeping-willow overhanging the Wairau River, near the Wairau Pa. The natives all turned out to observe the stranger, one old man indicating a spot some distance up the river where in former days they resorted in numbers.

Bittern (*Ardea pœciloptila*, Lath.).

Numerous.

Sandpiper (*Limnocinclus acuminatus*, Horsf.); **Godwit** (*Limosa baueri*, Naum.).

The godwit, known by the local trivial appellation of snipe, and shot and eaten as such, is plentifully distributed along the coast and estuaries of our rivers during its summer sojourn.

Pied Stilt (*Himantopus leucocephalus*, Gould); **Black Stilt** (*H. novæ-zealandiæ*, Gould).

Both species occur sparingly, and in localities far apart.

Knot (*Tringa canutus*, L.).

Pelorus Sound.

Southern Woodhen (*Ocydromus australis*, Sparrm.).

A pure-white albino was captured by a party near the Top-house, on the road to Nelson, and kept alive by its owner as a curiosity for a considerable time; until it began to assume the ordinary brown colouring, when the owner had it killed and mounted.

Striped Rail (*Rallus philippensis*, Linn.).

Now rare and widely distributed. While at Kenepuru at Christmas a young one was captured, and several others were reported from several localities in the same sound.

Swamp-crake (*Ortygometra affinis*).

Very rare.

Swamp-hen (*Porphyrio melanotus*, Linn.).

A rapidly-diminishing species. Albinos are frequently reported.

Paradise-duck (*Casarca variegata*, Gml.); **Little Teal** (*Querquedula gibberifrons*, Müller); **Brown Duck** (*Anas chlorotis*, Gray); **Grey Duck** (*A. superciliosa*, Gml.); **Shoveller Duck** (*Rhynchaspis variegata*, Gould); **Blue Mountain-duck** (*Hymenolæmus malacorhynchus*, Gould); **Black Teal** (*Fuligula novæ-zealandiæ*, Gml.).

The paradise-duck was formerly more numerous in this province than, owing to the progress of drainage and the consequent extension of agriculture, it is at present, though still by far the most abundant species.

Lake Grassmere, though little more than a lagoon, about three miles in diameter, situated along the coast between the Awatere River and Cape Campbell, and Lake Rae, situated in the open country between the Awatere and Clarence, and generally known as the Salt Lakes, are now its chief haunts. In the early days very heavy bags were obtained.

The Wairau lagoons, which cover an area of country equal to eight square miles, was in the early days alive with them during the shooting season, and "shootists" from all parts were there to be found congregated, with punts, swivel-guns, and every other gun guaranteed to kill. The result was that the birds were slaughtered by thousands to supply the Wellington market. This went on for years, till the local acclimatisation society prayed the Governor to proclaim it a protected area. This was granted, and now large flocks may be seen disporting themselves on the placid waters.

Of the remaining species none require any particular notice. The shoveller, or spoonbill, as known locally, is most generally found frequenting the two chief lagoons before mentioned. I recently examined a stuffed albino shot in the Awatere the general colouring of which resembled that of a silver-grey Hamburg fowl, the wings and neck being of a beautiful mottled silvery-grey. The bill was abnormally large and deeply coloured.

The range of the blue mountain-duck is restricted to the foamy mountain-torrents amid the lonely fastnesses of the Clarence, and the Kaikouras, although a few frequent the Awatere.

The little teal and black teal are the rarest species; and of the remaining species the grey duck is the commonest.

Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*, L.).

Very rare; I have heard of but few occurrences.

Black-backed Gull (*Larus dominicanus*, Licht.).

Everywhere plentiful. A large breeding - colony exists at the mouth of the Awatere River, from whence I recently obtained sixteen beautifully-marked eggs.

Mackerel Gull (*Larus scopulinus*, Forst.).

Not so numerous as the previous species.

Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*, Pallas); **Sea-swallow** (*S. frontalis*, Gray); **Common Tern** (*S. antarctica*, Forst.); **Little Tern** (*S. nereis*, Gould).

All numerous. The sea-swallow is called by the Sounds fishermen "barracouta-bird."

Black-eyebrowed Albatros (*Diomedea melanophrys*, Boie).

Mr. Joseph McMahon, of Kenepuru, secured a skeleton found on the Kenepuru beach, and by a careful comparison of its mandibles with those illustrative of this species in the Auckland Museum he was enabled to correctly determine the species.

Diving-petrel (*Halodroma urinatrix*, Gml.).

Plentiful.

Mutton-bird (*Procellaria tristis*, Forst.).

Most numerous off Jackson's Head.

Cape Pigeon (*Procellaria capensis*).

Often observed along the coast.

Dove-petrel (*Prion turtur*, Soland.).

Abundant.

Gannet (*Dysporus serrator*, Banks).

Abundant.

Black Shag (*Phalacrocorax novæ-hollandiæ*, Gould); **Friiled Shag** (*P. melanoleucus*, Vieill.); **White-throated Shag** (*P. brevirostris*, Gould); **Pied Shag** (*P. varius*, Gml.); **Spotted Shag** (*P. punctatus*, Sparrm.).

Owing to its special relish for trout, the black shag has become a marked bird to the local disciples of Isaac Walton. Considerable colonies are to be met with all round the coasts. At Port Underwood they are said to be particularly numerous. In the Kenepuru Sound, owing to continuous molestation, it has now become scarce.

The frilled shag is, owing to its cautious habits, called the "duck-scarer" by the sportsmen living in the above-mentioned Sound.

The spotted or king shag is apparently yearly increasing its range; the rocky islets off Jackson's Head have long been frequented by considerable numbers. Two immature birds brought to me from White's Bay were, so their captor said, "jist gittin' their toppins." It also frequents the sea-shore near Cape Campbell, the Flaxbourne Station, as well as a station to the south of Cape Campbell—localities all widely separated.

Crested Penguin (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*, Gray).

Several specimens during recent years have been secured in various localities. Two specimens now on sale here were captured in Queen Charlotte Sound.

Blue Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*, Forst.); **Little Penguin** (*E. undina*, Gould).

Both numerous.

ART. XXXIV.—*Bird-life on a Run.*

By H. GUTHRIE-SMITH.

[Read before the Hawke's Bay Philosophical Institute, 12th August, 1895.]

THE natural history of New Zealand at present is in a transition stage. The importation of new animals, the wide distribution of firearms, the felling and stocking and draining of country are all important factors in the great alterations that are occurring hourly in our colony. The indigenous creatures are being subjected now to a competition unknown before. In every direction they have to face changed surroundings, and this we shall see more or less in the paper I am about to read.

The natural history of New Zealand, however, is too large a theme to be treated to-night, and I shall confine myself to a branch of this interesting subject—bird-life on a run. I may state that the run here spoken of lies about twenty-five miles north-east of Napier. The nearest point lies about seven miles from the sea. There is a lake about three miles long in the centre of the property. The hills are limestone, and rise to about 1,600ft. In one part of the run there is a strip of pumiceous country. Some of the land is still in bush, some in fern, some in swamp and raupo and flax. For years,