

pened. She made after a duck that was lying partly asleep in the sunnshine near the fence and so quickly did she move that there was no time for the reclining duck to get out of the way. With a rush the fiery creature threw herself at the unsuspecting bird with such force that she missed her aim and hit the fence. For several months she waddled about with a broken leg and the other ducks had a more peaceful time; but no sooner had her leg mended than she started her bullying tactics again. By this time their clipped wings had been replaced so I let them out of the enclosure, when they soon spread into more congenial quarters. The mated pair nested and reared several families."

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## Field Notes on *Rallus pectoralis*

By P. A. GILBERT, Lakemba, New South Wales

My notes on the habitats of the Banded Landrail in *The Emu* for July of this year apply equally to the dispersal of the Lewin Water-Rail in eastern New South Wales, both species frequenting the same places and nesting in immediate proximity, especially in the salt-water swamps of George's River. These field notes are mainly confined, therefore, to observations on its habits, and some of the peculiarities which characterize the species.

The Lewin Water-Rail is not plentiful, and owing to its cautiousness and fondness for cover during the day, it is seldom seen in its haunts. Also the nature of the growth in which the species shelters affords ample protection from ordinary natural enemies. In cloudy weather it is more venturesome, being observed picking about in more open parts. It soon runs to cover, however, if startled in any way. Early in July, when the weather is bleak, I have observed the Water-Rail in the sunny open spaces of a swamp, searching for food in the mud and shallow water. As soon as the weather moderates, it becomes seclusive in its movements, and, consistently remaining under cover, no further indication of its presence is evident until nidification time.

Being chiefly nocturnal in its movements, the Water-Rail moves about with less restraint after sundown, whilst at dusk its activity is increased, when it may often be observed paddling across a pool in pursuit of aquatic organisms, with almost the same ease as birds adapted to natatory progression.

The familiar note of the Lewin Water-Rail sounds like "Cree-eek," sometimes loudly uttered twice or more, while other notes could easily be mistaken for those of some frog. On several occasions I have heard the "cree-eek" note uttered when I have suddenly startled the Water-Rail in the open.

Nests with eggs may be found from the latter part of September until early in January, the main brood being



Nest and Eggs of Lewin Water-Rail.

Photo. by P. A. Gilbert.

hatched during October and November. On George's River, complete sittings of fresh eggs are frequently found about the first week of October, and, during the last week of October the first of the season's broods makes its appearance. The nest is placed on or near the ground under growth that conceals it, preference being shown for a position which is slightly elevated in a swamp and where a few saplings grow up from the thick sedge. I have occasionally found the nest at the butt of a *Casuarina* sapling, and wondered whether the Rail used the sapling as a guide for the location of its nest during the night. In fresh-water swamps the nest is constructed under other prominent growths.

The nest is a loose structure composed of lengths of reed, rush, sedge and the like, which are rudely woven into a saucer-shaped receptacle for the eggs. It is generally about ten inches in diameter, and about one and a half inches deep. The nest illustrated was found resting lightly in a clump of sedge two feet from the ground, in the centre of the backwater swamp pictured in *The Emu* for July last. In that position the nest escaped tidal waters which often rose above the normal high water mark, destroying nests that were constructed on or near the ground.

The eggs are rounded-oval in shape, the surface being freckled and smudged with various shades of brown, relieved by a background of faint underlying markings of violet or mauve-grey in the body of the shell. The colouration is more pronounced on the larger end. The ground colour of the shell varies from creamy-white to creamy-pink. The average of several eggs measured is 1.36 x 1.03 inches. Three to five eggs comprise a sitting, and are generally laid on consecutive days. They take about nineteen days to incubate. The young birds, when newly hatched, are covered with blackish down which changes to a dense brownish-black as the chicks get older.

The Lewin Water-Rail seems to be more stationary than the Banded Landrail, confining its movements to the swamps more than the latter species. Except when in association with its young, it also appears to be more solitary than its larger companion, while its movements on the wing are much less frequently observed. Those are aspects in its habits which may repay further investigation.

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**Additional Species Occurring on Kapiti Island, New Zealand.**—Further to my list of Kapiti Island birds published in Vol. xxvi, part 4, and Vol. xxx, part 3, of *The Emu*, I now add the following: *Pterodroma lessoni*, *P. brevirostris*, *Thalassarche cauta*, *T. melanophris*, *Larus bulleri*, *Chlidonias albistriata*, *Hæmatopus unicolor* and *Casarca variegata*.—A. S. WILKINSON, Kapiti Island, N.Z.