Birds of the Wairarapa Plains

By KOBT. H. D. STIDOLPH, R.A.O.C., Wellington, N.Z.

These notes are supplementary to those published in Ena, Vol. XXIII., pages 29-37, to which paper I would refer readers for a description and map of the country under review. I left the district in June, 1924, and it was in consequence most of my notes terminated with my departure. Again I have to gratefully acknowledge to Mr. A. S. Wilkinson, R.A.O.C., my indebtedness for interesting notes and much help. Since writing my last paper I can add four more species to the birds of the district, namely: Tomtit (Pygodactylus t. t. t.), Black Fantail (Rhipidura fuliginosa) and Paradise Duck (Casurina variegata), and the introduced Brown Quail (Synurus australis). The latter was noted by Mr. Wilkinson on two occasions.

Grey Warbler (Geospiza igata).—On the 27th January, 1924, a pair of these birds was seen feeding a young Shining Cuckoo (Lamprocapnos bidulda). The cuckoo was fed mainly on a small yellowish-brown caterpillar common amongst manuka (Leptospermum). The Warbler is one of the few birds that trills its cheery notes throughout the year. During a week-end visit to the Wairarapa, on the 20th October last, Mr. Wilkinson located a Warbler's nest in a Leptospermum scoparium (manuka). It was placed 10 feet from the ground, and was secured on the top, sides and bottom with sprays of manuka. The nest was composed mostly of moss, dry rootlets and stems, and was lined with white feathers. Its most conspicuous feature was a porch (built practically entirely of dry rootlets), which protruded over the entrance hole for 3 in. The nest measured as follows:—Length, 4½ in.; width, 3½ in.; diameter of entrance hole, 1½ in. The nest contained young. This pair of Warblers was particularly consistent. We soon had erected a stage, and from this we took the accompanying photograph at a distance of only 2 ft. 6 in. from the bird. Mr. Wilkinson has found this species to be very abundant in the Wairarapa area.

North Island Tomtit (Pygodactylus t. t. t.).—A rare visitor. On the 4th November, 1923, Mr. Wilkinson saw a male bird, and on the 20th February and the 18th March of the following year I observed a male on each occasion. I have no record of this bird breeding in the district.

Black Fantail (Rhipidura fuliginosa).—A rare visitor. About three years ago a specimen of this bird was killed by a cat, in a suburb of Masterton. In the early part of 1924 I saw another Black Fantail in the district.

Grey-backed Silver-eye (Zosterops lateralis).—I have noted nests in a pine (Pinus radiata), seven feet from ground, and in a young totara (Podocarpus totara) on the end of a branch, five feet from ground. The latter nest was built almost entirely of wool, finished off with a little moss on the rim. I have noted it feeding on the small black seeds of the mullowaykia.

Tui (Prosthemadera novae-zealandiae).—On the 27th June, 1923, I visited a twenty-acre patch of hill-side brusa, three miles from Masterton. To my great surprise, it contained about twenty-five Tuis—I see them now playing pranks in the air, others were singing melodiously, others were feeding on the daisy-like marahou of the mullowaykia, and others again were flying madly from bush to bush. There were six or eight singing at one time. Their notes varied greatly. One bird specialized in creaks, one gave a call somewhat like that of a Kingfisher, another gave them so if it could not utter them quickly...
Gray Wattle (Acacia auriculiformis) bearing young.

Photo by R. H. O. Postlethwaite, F.Z.S.
Near and egg of Top-knot Pigeon (Leptotila verreauxi) in nest.
(See plate 217.)

Young Double-banded Dottrel (Chrocolais yncita) hiding amongst stones.
Photo by R. W. B. Rodgers, R.I.O.T.
enough, the notes of yet another resembled closely those of the Bell-bird. One bird invariably ended his performance with a "tut-tut." I approached very close to a singing bird. In the height of its concert, another Tuī alighted on a branch about one foot from the singing bird, and facing him, remained quite motionless for fully four minutes, while he poured forth his melodies. The performer would raise the feathers on his head and, before giving his usual note, would utter a soft mixture of warbles, scarcely audible. It would end up with a vehement "ow, ow," at the same time giving a slight toss of the head. I have seen a Tuī chase a Starling and a Kingfisher from a tree on which it was perched. In January I have observed Tuī fan the branches of the totara. This bird is certainly increasing in numbers in the Wairarapa.

Sacred Kingfisher (Halcyon sancta)—On the 15th October, 1928, we noted a pair attempting to make a nest-hole in a dead willow trunk. Five holes were attempted in the trunk, but one especially, received the bulk of attention. The birds would take up a position ten or fifteen feet away and fly straight to the hole, and a decided "thock" would be heard when the bill struck the wood. Occasionally the bird would stop at the hole and peck away pieces of wood. When a bird struck the tree, it would utter "chop-chop," and when on its return to a branch, "urp-urp-urp-urp" rather quickly. As soon as it settled again, a faint chirp would be heard, followed almost immediately by a note resembling "ewah, ewah." These operations and performances continued for some time, both birds working generally alternately. Eventually one flew away, when the other, after one more dig at the hole, flew to a prominent position and uttered "quack, quack, quack," and disappeared. After an absence of about five minutes, one bird returned and called "kwon, kwon, kwon," which immediately brought its mate home. Disguising with the "ewah" note, boring operations started again. However, a subsequent visit showed that the birds had deserted the proposed nesting-site. At the time I left the district, this bird was increasing in numbers.

Quail Hawk (Nestor nova-seelandiae).—A specimen shot in the early part of December, 1922, near Masterton, gave the following measurements:—Length, 19.25 in.; bill, 1 in.; wing from flexure, 10.75 in.; tarsus, 2.5 in.; cere and legs, lemon. Sex unknown, probably a female. On the 23rd and 24th June, 1924, two more birds were obtained near Masterton. They measured as followas:—(a) length, 17 in.; bill, 1 in.; wing from flexure, 10.25 in.; tarsus, 2.25 in.; cere and legs, light sea-green. Eye, dark brown. Immature (?); (b) length, 17 in.; bill, 1.65 in.; wing from flexure, 9.5 in.; tarsus, 2.25 in.; cere and legs, lemon. Eye, dark brown. The taxidermist who skinned this bird said he believed it to be a female. I am not at all satisfied that two species of *Nestor* inhabit New Zealand. I have therefore placed the three above-mentioned specimens under *Nestor nova-seelandiae*. Though the two latter would probably be regarded as examples of the Bush Hawk (*N. patas*—*australis*) by some ornithologists.

Banded Lani-Blend (Hapalornis phillipinensis).—I noted this bird on one occasion. According to reliable observers, it was fairly numerous in the district some years ago. It is certainly rare now.

Brown Bittern (Botaurus noctula).—Resident. I can state definitely that this bird breeds in the district, as on the 15th November, 1923, a person rang up and told me a young Bittern was seen in a suburb of Masterton. Investigation proved it to be a young Bittern, undoubtedly reared in a nearby swamp.

Dubbe-banded Dotterel (Charadrius bicinctus).—These birds frequent ploughed ground and stone paddocks as well as the river-beds. On 30th September, 1923, Mr. Wilkinson found a nest on the Waiwairua river-bed. It contained two eggs, and on the 7th October contained three, the usual clutch. The eggs were merely placed in a
Slight depression amid stones. On the same day, we also noted a Dotterel chick. On the 13th October, we discovered another young Dotterel hiding from us amongst the stones. The accompanying photograph, taken exactly as we found the bird, clearly shows its protective coloration and instinctive habits.

**White-headed Stilt** (*Himantopus leucocephalus*).—Contrary to the experience of Sir Walter Buller, on the 7th October, 1923, in company with Mr. Wilkinson, I saw four Stilts wading in deep water, their long legs being practically submerged, and the water touching their breasts. Of the four birds, one lacked the white collar on the hind neck, but had just a tinge of white in its place.

**Southern Black-backed Guil* (Larus dominicanus).**—These birds arrived at Waingawa somewhat earlier than is usual in 1923 (the following autumn and winter season was a boisterous one). Although really a non-breeding autumn and winter visitor, odd birds, mostly immature, may be seen in spring and summer months.

**Paradise Duck** (*Cardona variigata*).—Rare. Although continually about in the district, I did not note this species of duck in the Waikarapa before the 14th October, 1923, when with Mr. Wilkinson I saw a male bird on the Ruamahunga river bed. On the 20th November, we were fortunate to come across in the same locality a female with four ducklings. To my knowledge this bird is rare in this district, but is fairly plentiful in some neighbouring localities. It may be a regular breeder. Other reliable observers reported several of these birds in the same locality as those noted above.

I have been informed that the Blue-winged Shoveler (*Spatula cyanoptera*) has been seen in the district. It is very likely it does occur, but must be rare. I have not noted it, except around Waikarapa Lake, where it is fairly plentiful.

Rangitumau Hill, a few miles north of Masterton, was in the early days a favourite haunt, besides other species, of the Blue-waifled Crow (*Caloceras wilsonii*), Poppo (*Turnagra torquata*), and Huia (*Neomorphia antirostris*). In the swamps around Masterton the Fern-Bird (*Eowaderia punctata*) was abundant, and throughout the district roamed the Weka (*Callirallus australis*)—now these birds are but a memory to the “older hands,” gone, I am afraid, never to return.

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**Some Rare Birds in Tasmania**

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In Mr. Edwin Ashley’s interesting paper on “Extinct or Rare Australian Birds” read at the Conference in Hobart last year, he mentions (*Emu, XXIII.*, p. 182), the Orange-breasted Grass Parrot (*Neophema chrysoastra*), as having practically disappeared from the visited portions of South Australia between 1885 and 1918, in which year Dr. Morgan saw a number in the South-east, after which they again disappeared.

In *Emu, IX.*, p. 147, Mr. F. M. Little, of Launceston, records a trip which he made to North Island, off the north-eastern coast of Tasmania, and within sight of land. He describes the island as about 300 acres in extent, consisting principally of rocks and tussock-grass, with patches of sown grass. After