Destructive Civilization in New Zealand

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PART II

As already indicated, introduced birds are now particularly numerous in all parts of the country (New Zealand), some species, such as the Chaffinch, Song Thrush, and Blackbird, even penetrating to the depths of the most extensive forests. They have so largely supplanted native birds in all settled districts that they constitute ninety per cent. of the bird-life of such areas. The efforts at acclimatizing various alien species have already been dealt with extensively elsewhere, and there is no need to go into details here, except to mention that so great was the mistake in establishing foreign birds in New Zealand that altogether 136 species were liberated. In many cases, it must be admitted, the attempts made were very feeble ones, but out of this array of introductions thirty-two species have actually become established and many now exist in almost countless numbers. Unaided by man, several species have found their own way to the outlying islands, an interesting example of the migratory impulse which must have impelled these birds to leave the mainland. We can summarize the position of the introduced birds on the mainland (North and South Islands) as follows:

Generally distributed in suitable localities: Black Swan (Cygnus atratus), Pheasant (Phasianus colchicus), Californian Quail (Callipepla californica), Rock Pigeon (Columba livia), Greenfinch (Chloris chloris), Chaffinch (Fringilla coelebs), Lesser Redpoll (Acanthis cabaret), Goldfinch (Carduelis carduelis), House Sparrow (Passer domesticus), Yellowhammer (Emberiza citrinella), Song Thrush (Turdus philomelos), Blackbird (Turdus merula), Hedge Sparrow (Prunella modularis), Skylark (Alauda arvensis), Common Starling (Sturnus vulgaris), White-backed Magpie (Gymnorhina tympanica).

Restricted distribution (only established in certain districts): Mallard (Anas platyrhynchos), Canada Goose (Branta canadensis), Virginia Quail (Ocyris virens), Brown Quail (Saxicola cunicularia), Swamp Quail (Spatocis spp.), Little Owl (Athene noctua), White Cockatoo (Cacatua alba), Eastern Rosella (Platycercus eximius), Laughing Kingfisher (Dorothea nova), Siskin (Carduelis spinus), Linnet (Acanthis cabaret), Bullfinch (Pyrrhula pyrrhula), Cirl Bunting (Emberiza cirlus), Indian Myna (Acridotheres tristis), Black-backed Magpie (Gymnorhina tibicen), Rook (Corvus frugilegus).

Established in outlying islands:—Kermadec—Goldfinch, Song-Thrush, Blackbird, Starling, Chatham—Californian Quail.
man Quail, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, House Sparrow, Song-
Thrush, Blackbird. Auckland Islands—Goldfinch, Black-
bird. Campbell Islands—Lesser Redpoll, Goldfinch, House
Sparrow, Starling. Antipodes Islands—Goldfinch.

One of the most pleasing features of bird-life at the
moment is the tendency on the part of several native birds
which have hitherto been restricted to a forest habitat to
become established in settled districts, independent of the
bush. All the bush species enumerated in the opening
article as being generally distributed have already become
so established in most districts. The Morepork exists even
in the parks of our large cities, where there is no native
bush; the ShiningUCKT frequents town gardens as readily
as the countryside or bush areas; the Grey Warbler is well-
distributed everywhere in all classes of country carrying
any trees whatever; the Pied Fantail (and the Black Fantail
in the South Island) is almost as equally distributed but
in much smaller numbers. The Tomtit of both islands are
inclined to forsake the shelter of native bush in certain
districts; the Tuat has established itself as a breeding species
in some instances in town gardens; and the Silvereye is
entirely independent of forest, if it feels so inclined.

In addition to these species, there is some evidence to
show that the native Pigeon can live beyond the confines of
the forest, where it receives adequate protection. A case is
on record where a pair of Pigeons had inhabited for over
twenty years a plantation and a neighbouring patch of bush
bush around a Canterbury sheep-station, and has actually
bred in the plantation, and another instance is related
where a pair bred in a pine plantation in the same district.
The little Rifleman was observed the other day by the
writer on a hillside growth of gorse and heath, two intro-
duced shrubs, bordering a main highway, while another
observer records its existence in a Pines plantation in the
South Island. In Canterbury the species is also stated to
inhabit gardens in the neighbourhood of Waimate, and
in some cases is said to use holes in houses or sheds as
nesting sites. The Whitehead of the North Island is found
in detached areas of bush, but as yet has shown no great
liking to leave its natural home, although the writer has
recently seen it in an orchard on a Mangaweka farm,
adjacent to riverside bush. In the South Island especially,
the Bell-bird is a common visitor to town gardens, even
in close proximity to large towns, and in the North Island
it is occasionally seen in Eucalyptus plantations near
forests. All these instances indicate that there is some
reason to hope that in time it is possible that the birds
will become established as permanent residents in town
gardens and countryside plantations. Their evolution will
be watched with interest, and also that of the introduced
species, which, with a different environment from that in their natural home, may develop into new species. Certainly on that account their introduction will prove an interesting experiment.