

20. Gilbert, P. A. 'Female Birds in Plumage-display and Song-mimicry,' *The Australian Zoologist*, vol. 5, pt. 2, May 1928, pp. 141-147, pl. 24.
 21. Nubling, E. 'The Satin Bower-bird—Some Observations,' *Emu*, vol. 21, pt. 1, Jul. 1921, pp. 11-31, pls. 4-8.
 22. Marshall, A. J. 'Notes on the Satin Bower-bird in South-eastern Queensland,' *Emu*, vol. 34, pt. 1, Jul. 1934, pp. 57-61.
 23. Armstrong, E. A. *Bird Display*, 1942.
-

White Phase of the Reef-Heron (*Demigretta sacra*) in New Zealand

By K. A. WODZICKI, Wellington, N.Z., and
JAS. R. EYLES, Wairau Bar, N.Z.

While taking a bird census at Wairau Bar, near Blenheim, South Island of New Zealand, on April 15, 1944, we noticed a white-coloured bird perched on a stick near the first entrance to Wahanga Atangaroa lagoon. At first we took it to be an exceptionally small specimen of the Kotuku or White Egret (*Egretta alba*). Soon afterwards, when closer observation was possible, its features and behaviour proved beyond any doubt that the bird was the white phase of the Matuku-moana or Reef-Heron (*Demigretta sacra*), a most unusual occurrence for New Zealand.

The bird took up its residence at the estuary and in the surrounding lagoons either on Opawa or Wairau rivers, and since its discovery has been observed, at times from a distance of 20-25 yards, on the following dates: May 5, 10, 12, 14, 18, 20 and 22; June 5, 17 and 28; July 10, 11, 12, 13, 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26 and 30; August 5 and 23; September 1, 3 and 10; and at various dates up to the end of November, 1944.

The size of the Wairau Bar bird is within the range of the normal grey variety. The following description was noted: The plumage is entirely white; the bill is dusky blue from the tip to almost two-thirds the distance to its base, merging into greenish-yellow and, near the eyes, into dark yellow. The iris, which normally is yellow, is in our bird silver-grey. Finally the legs, which are normally greenish-yellow, are, in our specimen, greenish-blue in their upper parts and pale yellow nearer the foot.

As was noticed by Dr. R. A. Falla (who visited the estuary on August 29 and confirmed our findings), the Wairau Bar bird did not associate itself with normal birds of the same species. It roosted at different places, mostly on the breakwater, but changed its place of abode from one lagoon to another according to the presence of whitebait or shoals of small fish. When disturbed it uttered several harsh

croaking sounds in quick succession (half a second each). During its stay at Wairau Bar it was frequently attacked by Red-billed Gulls and once by a pair of Pied Oyster-catchers. These attacks did not cause the bird to give up its place, but often it made a dart at them with the bill, which is always pointed skywards when the bird is attacked.

According to Oliver (1930, p. 363) the "New Zealand specimens are almost always of the grey type." In the only white bird so far collected in New Zealand "wholly and partly slate-coloured feathers are scattered over the whole surface."

Mayr and Amadon (1941), in their paper on the geographical variation of *Demigretta sacra* in its breeding range, describe three colour phases—grey, white, and mottled, the last with a somewhat restricted distribution. It is interesting to note that in the white phase juvenile birds are usually mottled up to 50 per cent., and also that white birds in their first adult plumage frequently retain a few grey feathers though adults are all white or very rarely have a grey feather or two. It therefore seems likely that the Wairau Bar bird is an adult bird of the white phase.

The question arises now as to whether the Wairau Bar visitor is an accidental mutant of the grey form of New Zealand or has it to be considered as a straggler from one of the Pacific Islands. The unsociable behaviour of the bird and the fact that although almost certainly over a year old, it was not observed at Wairau Bar and surrounding districts prior to April 15, 1944, suggests the latter.

Information supplied by Dr. M. A. F. Barnett of the Meteorological Branch, Air Department, Wellington, which cannot be published in detail, shows that a tropical cyclonic disturbance originating in the general area of the Fiji Islands passed east of the North Island of New Zealand in the latter half of March, 1944.

REFERENCES

- Mayr, E., and Amadon, D. 'Geographical Variation in *Demigretta sacra* (Gmelin).' *Amer. Mus. Nov.*, no. 1144, October 13, 1941.
Oliver, W. R. B. *New Zealand Birds*, Wellington, 1930.

Black Swamp-Pheasant.—I have found melanism rare amongst Australian birds, and I was most surprised when last month a black Swamp-Pheasant (*Centropus phasianinus*) was discovered at the Myall Lakes, N.S.W. These birds frequent a former lake bed lying between Bombah Point and the ocean, and I know of no place in our coastal district where they are so numerous.—W. J. ENWRIGHT, West Maitland, N.S.W., 6/11/44.