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INTRODUCTION.

This issue is the first printed publication of the Society. Printing will be a strain on our resources, but is much more satisfactory than the old method, and will provide us with a larger number of copies. It is hoped that members will continue to contribute to the Publication Fund, and will endeavour to obtain new members whenever possible. To assist in this a printed circular has been prepared, and copies will be sent on request to anyone who can pass them on to prospective new members. The Society acknowledges with thanks an anonymous donation of 36/- to cover the cost of the circular, and the loan of the block by Mr. Richdale; also 5/- from Dr. Falla and 1/11 from Mr. Graham. The Society is also very thankful to have received two separates of papers from the British Trust for Ornithology. These are reviewed below, and are available for loan to members on receipt of postage.

The response of members to the special investigation appeals has been disappointing, and it is hoped that more information will be forthcoming. Don't just read other people's observations; make your own and join in the organised efforts. It is much more interesting. Everyone should have some information on some of our special topics: the Banded Dotterel, the Dabchick, the White-eye, the dates of singing and nesting and the sizes of clutches. We have added another investigation in which most members should be able to take part; that is, the spread and distribution of the introduced Australian Magpies. In the next issue we hope to publish a statement on this subject by Mr. McCaskill (Training College, Christchurch), who is the organiser, and to whom notes should be sent.

REPORT OF MEETING.

A meeting of members was held at Canterbury Museum on December 9, nine being present, with Dr. Falla in the chair. The main subject discussed was the question of a printed publication. It was decided that in future this should be printed, and that for convenience it should have the brief title, "New Zealand Bird Notes." The editors were instructed to carry out careful economy of space, and it was decided that authors be asked to meet the extra cost should they desire to include blocks or tables.

OBITUARY.

Members will learn with regret of the passing of Mr. S. Wilkinson, of Paraparaumu Beach, Wellington. He was a true bird-lover, and his death in the prime of life is a loss to the Society. He was the son of Mr. and Mrs. A. S. Wilkinson, of Kapiti Island, both of whom are members.

REVIEWS.

"The Emu," Vol. XLII, pt. 2, Oct., 1942. This number contains two New Zealand papers, and amongst others an interesting one of the Lyre Bird. "Where: Island Home of Petrels and other Birds," by L. E. Richdale, is an account of a small island, only 50 yards across, near Stewart Island. Seventeen species were recorded, of which seven were breeding. The estimated population of petrels was 2250. In addition to general notes on the fauna and flora, a large part of the paper deals with the activities of the Mutton Birds (*P. griseus*). "Review of the smaller Pacific forms of *Pterodroma* and *Cookilaria*," by Dr. R. A. Falla, deals with the systematics of a group of petrels. Though a paper principally of interest to specialists, it is a contribution towards the solution of one of the problems of classification in our area. There seems no doubt but that the notes and measurements of field workers, if properly taken, might be of very great assistance in such systematic work.

"The Royal Albatross," by E. L. Richdale. (Issued by the author, price 2/-.) This is a popular account of the life history of the bird and of the colony of Otago Peninsula, illustrated by a number of excellent photographs. It contains some controversial matter concerning the protection of the colony.

The following separates were donated by the British Trust for Ornithology: "Quantitative Studies in the Geographical Variation of Birds—the Common Guillemot (*Uria aalge* Pont.), by H. N. Southern and E. C. R. Reeve, P.Z.S., Ser. A, Vol. III., 1941. This bird has two forms, one with and one without a white line round the eye, and generally speaking the percentage of the "ringed" form increases from south to north. The paper deals with a study of this phenomenon, together with maps and mathematical treatment. It is an important subject for New Zealand ornithologists, as we have several dimorphic species here which require investigation.

"Report on the Redshank Inquiry, 1939-40," by J. F. Thomas. Brit. Birds, Vol. XXXVI. The Redshank is a bird which has spread

very noticeably in the British Isles in the past 100 years. It was accordingly selected for special study by the British Trust. The paper also deals with its nesting and feeding habits. It is of interest to us, especially from the point of view of the methods used in tackling such an investigation.

INVASION OF SPINE-TAILED SWIFTS.

The bird nests in eastern Asia and winters in Australia and Tasmania. According to Oliver's book, only one specimen has been taken in New Zealand, but at the end of November "hundreds" were reported near Greymouth, and specimens have been seen as far apart as Auckland and South Canterbury. Clearly this is worth special mention, and all members are asked to look out for these birds, to gather information, and to send it in, so that a full account may be prepared. This bird has a wing spread of about 18 inches, very long wings, and a swift and conspicuous flight.

Report for Period Ending June, 1942, on Population, Song, and Habits of Birds in Masterton Gardens.

By J. M. CUNNINGHAM.

(The first part of this paper, dealing with methods of observation, appeared in the third bulletin for 1941-42.)

J. M. Cunningham—March 12—June 30.

R. H. D. Stidolph—April 1—June 30.

S. B. Yelverton—April 15—June 30.

The following notes are those of J.M.C. first, with any essential differences noted by R.H.D.S. and S.B.Y. added. The areas under observation are: J.M.C.—town garden with open paddock on two sides, and R.H.D.S. and S.B.Y.—the district adjoining this, between their homes and work. The times of observation are before nine, lunch hour, and after about three in all cases, plus week-ends.

BLACKBIRD.—This bird has been constantly present, with little fluctuation in numbers. An autumn song commenced on March 12, the first for some time, at least a month (four songs were heard in February, each lasting only three or four seconds). It continued, spasmodically (two or three songs every day or two), through April and ceased on May 5, since when it has not been heard. Except for one or two full songs, this song was short, up to half a minute, but during April were heard about a dozen sub-songs, which last several minutes, and while exceedingly beautiful, are audible only within a few yards of the singer.

General moulting took place through the whole of March, and was complete by the beginning of April, except for one female seen in moult on May 14. A record of male fighting male was recorded on April 24.

R.H.D.S.—No songs heard except one or two sub-songs in April.

S.B.Y.—Two part songs only (in May). In April and May were four records of fighting—three of male v. male and one of male v. female. June—five records of fighting, male v. female, another female spectator.

NOTE.—The “occasional” song which commenced as the moult was tapering off was not noted to any extent out of J.M.C.’s garden.

CHAFFINCH.—Although constantly present, during May and June a diminution in the numbers of males present was noticed, and of male and female during the last fortnight in June.

The first song for a considerable period was heard on March 9, and several songs, mostly “part,” i.e., without the characteristic slur at the end, were heard up to April 22, when they ceased altogether.

R.H.D.S.—Part songs heard on April 22, May 13, June 15. Male chasing female June 11, male fighting male June 15.

S.B.Y.—Part songs heard May 1, 2, 12, 13.

GOLDFINCH.—Constantly present in considerable numbers (flocks 20-50) during March and April and first week in May, during which month the numbers lessened rapidly, and only three or four have been seen during June.

Song (full) was heard every two or three days (none since 17th)—first for some time on March 21, and there were several occasions when regular songs were heard several days in succession. Song stopped finally on May 23.

R.H.D.S.—Not seen after April 4 until May 1, and spasmodically since. Several songs in May.

S.B.Y.—Second half April and all May noticed most days; June lessening in numbers. Occasional songs in May, none in June.

GREENFINCH.—Present several successive days in April, since when only noticed once (May).

R.H.D.S.—Not seen in April or May; single bird observed on four occasions in June.

S.B.Y.—Not seen.

J.M.C.’s records were of the bird’s call. The birds were not seen, and it is believed to be present far more often.

HEDGE SPARROW.—Constantly present in small numbers. No song third week in March, after which heard occasionally every day except for a complete gap from May 8 to 24, since when song has been spasmodic; i.e., odd songs every day or two (full and part songs).

R.H.D.S.—Part songs heard between May 8 and 22; frequently in June. Fighting on June 15.

S.B.Y.—No song in April; more or less regular part song in May and a fewer number in June. Fighting on May 3.

KINGFISHER.—Seen four times during March, May, and June, always about the same time in the same position. This time is 3.15

as the writer arrives in the garden, and suggests that it may be present more often than supposed.

R.H.D.S.—Several records in April, May and June.

S.B.Y.—Two records in May.

MAGPIE.—Three birds constantly present with full song; April present and singing nearly every day; May heard singing 9-18 and 28-30. Not seen in June.

R.H.D.S.—One heard in April and one in May.

S.B.Y.—Not seen.

MORPORK.—Heard once only crying "morpork," March 30.

R.H.D.S.—One in April and one in May.

WHITE-EYE.—During period groups of four or five seen. No large flocks seen. Occasionally noted each day in March, several times daily in April, in greater numbers at end of month, and diminished during May, increasing to fair numbers during June. Did not start feeding until Cotoneaster berries were finished. Song on June 28; reported to have sung previously.

R.H.D.S.—First winter flock on June 15, about 100. Song heard throughout period at frequent intervals.

S.B.Y.—More regular occurrence in May and June. Songs heard occasionally since May 11.

SKYLARK.—Absent until April 11, when it appeared and started singing two days later. Several songs heard on each of several days during the remainder of the month, occasionally during May with a gap from 11th-28th, and only once during June.

R.H.D.S. and S.B.Y.—Occasionally seen flying over town.

SPARROW.—Constantly present in large numbers. Fight, male v. male, April 16.

S.B.Y.—Several fights, male v. male and male v. female.

STARLING.—Constantly present in large numbers.

S.B.Y.—Fight, May 16.

THRUSH.—Present in small numbers, March and April, with occasional songs. May 1 occasional song; 2nd, 3rd, 4th, several songs; regular full song ever since. Numbers increased with start of song, and are about in large numbers now. Four fights April, May and June.

R.H.D.S.—Seldom seen in April; singing daily since May 2.

S.B.Y.—Fight April 13; few songs in April.

J.M.C.—A bird sang in the same place every day from April 14-30. May 4 was the beginning of regular song in immediate locality.

TUL.—Arrived May 6 and present ever since. Regular residence from end of May. Song as presence; i.e., regular since end of May.

R.H.D.S.—First noted on April 22; seen occasionally since; more frequent in June. Song heard throughout.

S.B.Y.—First seen May 17, singing, and few songs heard same month. Present regularly June.

GREY WARBLER.—Not often actually seen, but records made usually by song. Is regarded as constantly present. Song regular, all day and every day up to beginning April, since when, after a sudden break, one or two songs only every day. The day before regular song ceased (April 1) the song was most persistent all day. Fights April 16, June 28.

R.H.D.S.—Constantly present; song throughout not so regular in June. Fighting on May 20, June 5 and 10.

S.B.Y.—Singing April and May; easing off since June 12.

YELLOWHAMMER.—Seen twice only; June 1, three believed seen; June 28, two seen.

R.H.D.S.—Not seen until June 11; occasionally seen since.

TIME OF WAKENING OF BIRDS.

Waking takes place from 35-50 minutes before sunrise, and the usual is 40 minutes. All March and April the Blackbird woke first with its characteristic "chinking" sound, but from the beginning of May this eased off, and ceased after a week, and its place was taken by the full song of the Thrush, which is the first and only sound heard for ten minutes or so, when the Tui sings. During May the early song was deafening, but it has now eased off, and only a few birds sing so early. The White-eye is at present appearing about 7.10 a.m.

WEEKLY SUMMARIES.

| MARCH | APRIL | | | | MAY | | | | JUNE | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|---|---|------|------|------|------|
| | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | |
| Time of sunrise: 6.17 6.24 | | | 6.25 | 6.42 | 6.50 | 6.57 | 7.07 | 7.14 | 7.21 | 7.27 | | | 7.36 | 7.40 | 7.46 | 7.47 |
| Time of wakening: 5.50 5.50 | | | 6.00 | 6.10 | 6.10 | 6.20 | 6.30 | — | 6.40 | 6.50 | | | 6.45 | 6.45 | 6.50 | 7.00 |

A heavy frost tends to make wakening time earlier, and a dull morning five or ten minutes later.

OCCURRENCE OF THE BLACK-BILLED GULL.

In view of recent records of the Black-billed Gull *Larus bulleri*, in the Thames-Bay of Plenty-Rotorua area, notes of its appearance in the Wellington district may be of interest.

On March 2, 1941, one was seen at the north end of Wairarapa Lake; a week later three were recorded, and on April 20, two. It is likely that a few visit this locality every autumn and winter, presumably from the South Island.

In spite of published statements to the effect that the Black-billed Gull is frequently seen in Wellington Harbour, I am unable to confirm these reports. On June 5, 1938, I carefully examined through binoculars well over a thousand small gulls in Wellington Harbour, and out of this assemblage could find only one Black-billed bird.

In the Marlborough district (South Island) I have records as follows:—January 7, 1939, Picton: About twenty-four and no sign of any Red-billed. November 24, 1939: Red-billed Gulls at the entrance to Tory Channel; no small gulls of either species at Picton. November 26, 1939: Two Red-bills at White Rocks. November 29, 1939, Wairau River mouth: Between 300-400 Red-billed Gulls breeding and six Black-bills frequenting the river bank near the colony. On November 13, 1940, several Black-bills were seen at the mouth of the Tereimakau River, Westland, but no Red-bills.

R. H. D. Stidolph.

NOTES ON THE BUILDING OF A WARBLER'S NEST.

The building of the Warbler's nest found on September 1st was carefully observed.

Female did all the work, both carrying material and placing it in position. The male followed her about, giving frequent songs, but carried nothing. (In another nest I had under observation the male frequently brought material to the nest, but was never allowed to place it in position.)

Observation over timed periods indicated that the female made an average of fifty trips per hour, covering about fifty yards (there and back) each time. For two or three minutes in every fifteen or so she would take time off for feeding. The collecting was done very systematically, each trip being made a few yards to the left or right of the previous one, so that all the region was covered. Nesting material varied from the veins of old poplar leaves to spider web obtained by hovering under an electric light insulator.

The process of nest construction was as follows:—A firm patch of material was woven round the suspension point. From this the sides were built down all round until it resembled a cylinder open at the bottom, and with a hole for the entrance on one side. The sides were then tapered inwards and finally joined. The nest was a somewhat loose, unformed structure with a very narrow central cavity. The female then entered with lining material, and her weight greatly increased the cavity in the interior. As lining proceeded the cavity was actually increased in size as the female wriggled and twisted. This process stretched the outer layers so that they became taut and neat in the finished article. Once the outer framework had been completed most of the construction was done from the inside, although occasionally she would cling to the outside to make some minor adjustment. From start to finish the building of this nest took only seven days.

—P. C. Bull.

FIGHT BETWEEN GREY WARBLERS.

The Grey Warbler is not usually considered to be a pugnacious bird; at least, I have never found it so. Only once have I seen it engaged in conflict. This was on May 20, and the battle went on more or less continuously throughout the day, which was warm and sunny. The trouble apparently arose over the arrival of a strange male in the garden, which is frequented by a pair of warblers at all times of the year save the breeding season, when they betake themselves to a neighbouring garden to build, leaving us to speculate on their activities, and my husband to bewail his luck when they return to us later in the year with a young family, or what is worse from his point of view, a young Shining Cuckoo!

I was attracted to the garden on this day by the cries of the female. She was dancing excitedly on the top of a young matipo and uttering short, shrill cries of alarm. On the ground were two warblers—I presume they were males—tumbling over and over, firmly attached to each other by their bills. While I was watching them the hen flew down and joined in the fight, and only the thought of the fright I would give them and the glare in their angry little red eyes prevented me from grabbing a handful of them. After landing a few pecks here and there the hen flew back to her perch and began preening herself indifferently—and not too indifferently either, for if one of the males eased off for a moment she immediately began a shrill twittering and fluttering, which had the effect of driving the two combatants together again. They frequently flew up into the air after the manner of butterflies, until I almost lost sight of them, then suddenly darted down again and began chasing each other through the bushes. The hen joined in this for a few minutes, and as they darted in and out so quickly, I wondered how they avoided the branches. Of me they were entirely oblivious, and I was obliged to dodge many times to avoid a collision. Indeed, once I wasn't quick enough, or perhaps I went too far, as I was scratched on the cheek, and felt the mark for several hours. The fight was absolutely silent, though I could hear the click of bills, and the female I think it was gave shrill little cries repeatedly. For no apparent reason they would suddenly cease fighting and break into song or feed about for a while. They spent most of their time on the ground, where it really looked as though one or other would be killed. Both had their bills wide open and seemed more or less exhausted. At times they would fly up into the air, bill to bill, tails outspread, and remain hovering, as the humming bird does, for a few seconds. I hadn't realised before just how tiny the bird is or what beady little red eyes start out of its head when it is excited.

Later in the day the warblers disappeared, still fighting spasmodically, through the neighbour's fence, and I do not know whether the unwanted bird was driven off or became easy prey for the neighbour's tomcat, for I hear the others in the garden now, and the cock is bursting himself with song.

—Mrs. R. H. D. Stidolph.