

1892.

NEW ZEALAND.

NATIVE NEW ZEALAND BIRDS

(MEMORANDUM BY LORD ONSLOW RESPECTING THE DIMINUTION OF, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THEIR PRESERVATION, &c.).

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

MEMORANDUM for the Hon. the PREMIER and the Hon. the MINISTER of LANDS respecting the Diminution of Native New Zealand Birds, &c., and Suggestions for their Preservation.

It is admitted by naturalists that New Zealand possesses in some respects the most interesting avifauna in the world. It is a melancholy fact that, under the changed condition of existence, this remarkable avifauna is passing away. Some of the species have already disappeared, whilst others are verging on extinction. Take, for example, the wingless birds of New Zealand. These diminutive representatives of the gigantic brevipennate birds which formerly inhabited New Zealand are objects of the highest interest to the natural-historian. The kiwis, like their colossal prototypes the moas, once existed in very considerable numbers in almost every part of the country. At the time of the first colonisation of New Zealand, fifty years ago, they were still abundant in all suitable localities. At the present day their last refuges may be indicated on the map without any difficulty. The North Island species (*Apteryx bulleri*) is still comparatively plentiful in the wooded heights of Pirongia and in the bosky groves of the Upper Wanganui. From all other localities where formerly numerous it has practically disappeared. The South Island kiwi (*Apteryx australis*) is now met with only in widely-scattered localities on the West Coast. The small spotted or grey kiwi (*Apteryx oweni*), of which perhaps thousands could have been obtained a few years back, has succumbed to the ravages of the stoat and weasel, the persecution by wild dogs, and the necessities of roving diggers, and it is only now to be found in any number along the lower wooded ranges of the Southern Alps. *Apteryx haasti* is one of our rarest species, and *Apteryx maxima* is strictly confined to the wooded parts of Stewart Island.

The kakapo, or ground-parrot (*Stringops habroptilus*), which was formerly so abundant in the wooded country along the whole of the West Coast Sounds and on the western slope of the Southern Alps, is becoming a scarce bird. According to Mr. Richardson, who recently read an exhaustive paper on the subject before the Otago Institute, both the kiwi and the kakapo are now confined to very restricted districts, within which, under the combined attacks of introduced wild dogs and cats, stoats, weasels, and ferrets, they are fast diminishing.

The blue-wattled crow and South Island thrush, which were every-day camp-visitors when Sir James Hector explored the West Coast in 1863, are now very rarely seen; whilst in the North Island the native thrush and some of the smaller birds have disappeared altogether.

Prominent writers on zoological science, such as Professor Newton, of Cambridge, Professor Flower, at the head of the British Museum, and Dr. Sclater, the accomplished secretary of the Zoological Society of London, have over and over again urged the importance of some steps being taken for the conservation of New Zealand birds; and they have pointed out that it will be a lasting reproach to the present generation of colonists if no attempt is made to save some—if only a remnant—of these expiring forms for the student of the future. Thus, Professor Newton, in his address to the Biological Section of the British Association, at Manchester, in 1887, saith: "I would ask you to bear in mind that these indigenous species of New Zealand are, with scarcely an exception, peculiar to the country, and, from every scientific point of view, of the most instructive