



GANNETS—WHITE ISLAND

Wireless Hut in background

Bernard Sladden

# BIRDS

*New Zealanders!*

*Protect your Native Birds!*

ISSUED BY

**N.Z. NATIVE BIRD PROTECTION SOCIETY**

**E V. Sanderson, Hon. Sec., Box 631, Wellington**

OBJECTS—To advocate and obtain the efficient protection and preservation of our native birds, a bird day for our schools, and unity of control of all wild life.

Affiliated with the International Committee for Bird Protection.

The foundation of true conservation is in the setting aside of sanctuaries efficiently and rigidly controlled by men who know how.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS :—Endowment Member, £1 ; Ordinary Members, 5/- ; Children, 1/. (Membership open to all)**

Bulletin No. 13

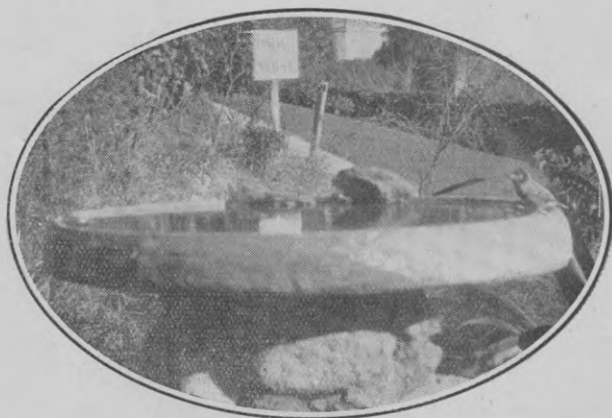
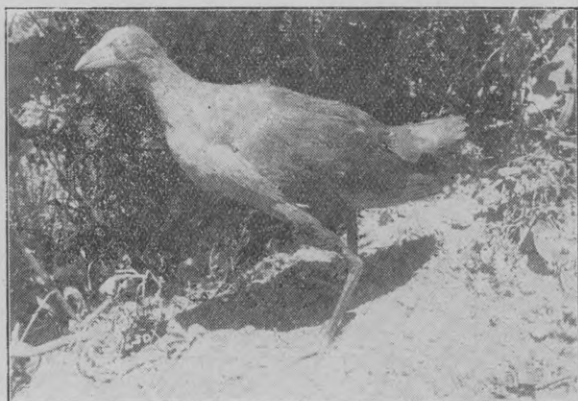
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PUKEKO

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White-eye at Bird bath  
(see page 9)

Photo by S. C. Jones

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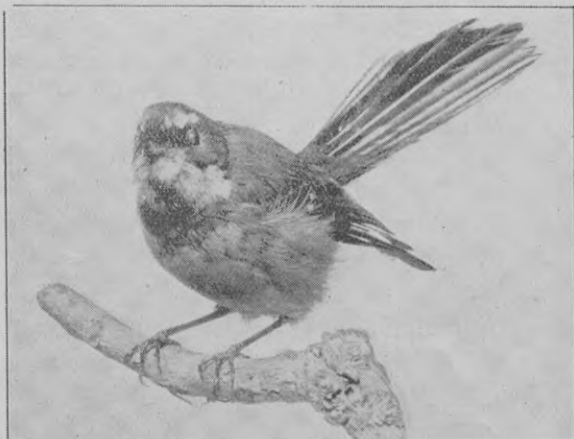
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PIED FANTAIL

One of New Zealand's  
most useful insect-eat-  
ing birds.

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GODWIT OR KUAKA

## *The New Zealanders' Heritage*

### *Our Birds and Forests*

**N**O race can long exist without forests. In New Zealand our forests are being destroyed at a far greater rate than they are being replaced by exotics. Our indigenous forests are vital as a regulation to climatic conditions. Lack of a sufficiency of forests produces a harsh, hard, barren atmosphere with extremes of rain, drought, and wind: conditions unsuitable to the economic use of our soil. Much of our land is extremely steep, and the soil being of a friable nature is very subject to erosion. Our birds are necessary to the existence of our forests and to the existence of our pastoral and agricultural industries in no uncertain manner. We are destroying our heritages bequeathed us by Nature. It took our forests thousands and thousands of years to produce the soil on our hills. Are we living on our capital and calling it profit, and will there be a day of reckoning when Budgets refuse to balance and our eroded and insect-infested lands refuse to yield a sufficiency? Surely it is the duty of every New Zealand citizen to help to safeguard our heritages.

**EXTRACT FROM "THE FARM JOURNAL,"  
PHILADELPHIA, APRIL, 1927.**

**26 FACTS ABOUT BUGS AND BIRDS.**

(By CHARLES P. SHOFFNER.)

We are all so busy doing this, that, and the other thing, that often matters of great importance are neglected. What do you know about our bird life? What do you know about bugs? The 26 facts below may help:—

- (1.) The great fact of biology is the incessant war between insects and man.
- (2.) The number of insect species is greater by far than that of all other living creatures.
- (3.) Insects prey upon every kind of vegetation that man produces.
- (4.) Insects prey upon all domestic animals.
- (5.) The abundance of insect pests is due largely, if not entirely, to the upsetting of Nature's laws by man.
- (6.) Insects are enormously productive. If one pair of Colorado potato-beetles were allowed to increase without molestation by man or their other enemies, in one season (three broods) the progeny would amount to more than 60,000,000.
- (7.) The unrestricted increase of the gipsy-moth would be so great that the progeny of one pair would be numerous enough in eight years to devour all the foliage in the United States.
- (8.) Many caterpillars daily eat twice their weight in leaves.
- (9.) An American silkworm, 56 days old and weighing 207 grams, consumed not less than 120 oak leaves weighing three-fourths of a pound, and drank over half an ounce of water.
- (10.) There are vegetable-feeders, caterpillars, which, during their progress to maturity, within 30 days, increase in weight 10,000 times.
- (11.) Ten per cent. or more of everything raised in the United States is destroyed by insect pests.
- (12.) A \$100,000,000 loss to trees is caused by insects yearly in the United States, by reason of the decrease in the number of native song and insectivorous birds.
- (13.) Spraying is fairly successful in fighting insect pests, but each year more spraying must be done. Spraying is a control measure, and not a cure.
- (14.) It is clearly within the bounds of probability that insects may make this world a desert and destroy the human race.

- (15.) Birds are natural enemies of insect life.
- (16.) A French naturalist has estimated that if all birds were to disappear, man could live on the earth only nine years; for, without birds, all plants, trees, and vegetables would disappear; worms and bugs would eat them root and branch. When that happened, the cattle and the sheep would not have enough to eat, and they would all die. Mankind, unable to survive on fish, or on the insects themselves, would perish miserably in a horrible crawling, creeping world.
- (17.) A noted ornithologist estimates that in 60 years, bird life in this country has dwindled 75 per cent. Thirteen species of migratory birds have been entirely exterminated, and thirty more are travelling the same road.
- (18.) As birds decrease, insect hordes increase. This must be reversed.
- (19.) If the right balance of bird life can be restored, insect pests can be successfully controlled.
- (20.) Insectivorous birds can devour an incredible number of insects, and their nestlings require more of this food, in proportion to their weight, than do the adult birds.
- (21.) In one test 165 cut worms were fed to a three-ounce young robin, and the robin went to sleep hungry.
- (22.) A pair of rose-breasted grosbeaks feed their nestlings 426 times in eleven hours, and the food cannot be less than 848 larvae or caterpillars.
- (23.) In another case, 220 tent-caterpillars were found in the stomach of a yellow-billed cuckoo; 500 mosquitoes were in a nighthawk's stomach. A warbler will eat 3,500 plant lice in one hour.
- (24.) Hawks and owls eat an enormous amount of mice, rats, and other rodents; 3,000 skulls of gophers and mice were found under the nest of a pair of barn owls.
- (25.) Man is the greatest exterminator of bird life. Man, with his gun, trap, cat, and dog, has been directly or indirectly responsible for the great decrease in bird life.
- (26.) Birds must be increased, and this can be done: (a) by educating all to the value of bird life; (b) by attracting birds to our homes and farms by putting up bird-houses and giving them protection and food during the winter months; (c) by passing laws to insure their protection; and (d) by establishing a National Bird Day on the second Friday in every April.

Join the N.Z. Bird Protection Society and help its activities, as just such similar happenings are occurring in New Zealand.

## THE CARUNCULATED SHAG.

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This bird has been placed on the list of absolutely protected birds, and it is now illegal to interfere with it in any manner. It is found in Queen Charlotte Sound, and nowhere else in the world. Owing to the avidity of collectors and others, it is threatened with extermination, and its existence as a species rests solely with the residents and visitors to the Sound. It is hoped the Queen Charlotte Sound people will make every endeavour to adequately safeguard this bird on its rocky home, lest it share the fate of the moa and the dodo.

The carunculated shag is entirely sea-going, and does not frequent rivers. It is, moreover, a large and beautiful bird.

Sir Walter Buller states (1905):—"Unless the Government extends its protection to this species of shag on its last known refuge, the White Rocks, near the mouth of Queen Charlotte Sounds, it will ere long be completely wiped out. A few breeding places remain, and if these are rigidly protected, this species will soon re-establish itself."

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## WHITE ISLAND.

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A visit was recently made to White Island by a party wishing to spend a couple of days there with the object of observing the bird life, and it was very pleasing to note that the manager of the company, now operating the sulphur deposits, has not allowed the birds to be interfered with or molested in any way at all. The gannets nesting in the vicinity of the huts are totally indifferent to the presence of the men, as they pass by on the regular tracks that skirt the rookeries. There is a small wire netting enclosure round the hut known as the guest hut, and the fence cuts off a corner of the original nesting ground, but the gannets continue to occupy the ground right up to the line of the fence, and at first sight look like a flock of poultry crowded together in a pen.

Shafts have been sunk in various places to test the depth of the deposits, and these would have been veritable death traps for the birds, but they have been protected with a covering of pohutukawa branches, and for the present at any rate the danger is thus obviated.

A rare visitor, a Sclater penguin, arrived on the shore of Crater Bay while we were on the island. The bird was much exhausted and in a battered condition when it struggled ashore, but by the following morning it had recovered to some extent, and when we last saw it, standing on a big boulder, though still looking rather forlorn, it was very different from the bruised and bedraggled object of the day before.

At Rurima Rocks it was noticed that the shag rookery had suffered to some extent through one of the large pohutukawas being uprooted in a gale. Many old-established nests were brought to earth with it. The waters in the vicinity of the rookery have been long famous for their plenitude of fish, and there appears to be no depletion in their numbers despite the extraordinary rapacity of the cormorants that have lived and bred in the vicinity for generations following generations for ages past; a fact which goes to uphold the contention of noted ornithologists and others that on the whole the operations of these birds are beneficial rather than harmful to fish culture, in that they mostly destroy the class of fish which feed on fish ova and fry. Indeed, the operations of such birds in relation to fish supply must be merely a drop in the ocean in comparison to the quantity of eatable fish which the sea-monsters (swordfish, etc.) of the locality must daily consume.

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### WEASELS, STOATS, Etc.

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Mr. W. W. Smith, who is a naturalist of life long experience, now resident in New Plymouth, has some interesting remarks to make with reference to recent reports of weasels killing lambs and sheep in the Taranaki and Hawkes Bay districts. His remarks give food for the thought that perhaps a larger number of lambs fall victims to the bite of these animals than is generally credited. The two needle-like punctures made in the vicinity of the jugular vein are so small that they cannot be definitely detected unless the skin of the neck is removed right up to the ears and the underside carefully examined. A little close examination of dead lambs by farmers might be of very considerable interest. Weasels are more prone to attack lambs in very cold weather, probably owing to the then greater difficulty in obtaining food from their usual sources. Mr. Smith states:—

Having recently read several articles published in the newspapers announcing the finding of dead sheep and lambs, each with a deep wound behind the ear, I have been surprised at the doubt expressed by the writers of the articles as to the cause or the wounds and the death of the animals. The description given of the position and nature of the wounds proves unmistakably that it is the work of weasels. These fierce and rapacious little mammals have been known for centuries to kill sheep and lambs. Occasionally several weasels act in concert in attacking their larger prey. Three years ago seven attacked a man at Awapuni, near Palmerston North. Several old English natural history works also contain accounts of weasels attacking and injuring children. The weasel hunts chiefly by scent, the stoat by sight.



The bite of the weasel is alike painful and poisonous. It is of rare occurrence that any animal bitten by a weasel recovers from the wound. Of the six European species belonging to the order, namely, the ferret, marten, polecat, sable, stoat, and weasel, the last, though the smallest, is the most active, aggressive, and destructive. The marten, polecat, and sable emit an extremely offensive odour when molested or assailed by natural enemies, which acts as a protective warning. When a schoolboy living on a wealthy gentleman's estate in the Homeland, I devoted a Saturday occasionally, and days during holidays, to trapping stoats and weasels, for which I received threepence each from the squire. I was occasionally sent with a ferret to the warren to net and bring home a pair of good rabbits for the squire's table. Rabbits were a luxury in those days, and probably still are in England. During several visits to the warren, and before searching the burrows, the ferret would become highly excited and erect its fur in a menacing manner. The ferret's excitement was caused by a polecat's "aroma" in a near burrow. The style of trap which I then used is a good one for catching stoats and weasels. Procure a three or four-inch drainpipe and lay it on the ground near the haunts of these pests. Put some meat or fowl—the head of a fowl is a good bait—in the centre of the pipe. Fasten the latter down with a bent green stick, and place a light rat-trap at each end of it. It is always better to cover the lightly-set traps with fine earth, and set them towards evening. Stoats are not so easily caught in traps as are weasels.

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## OPOSSUMS IN NATIVE FORESTS.

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Notwithstanding the many incontrovertible truths published in newspapers during the last two years proving the serious ravages wrought by opossums on much of the vegetation in New Zealand's glorious native bush, there are yet advocates for their introduction into all areas of native forests, for the sake of revenue from their fur. The individual or society advocating such action can only be actuated by a desire for personal kudos and mercenary gain. That opossums living and feeding in the native bush are a very serious menace to its well-being and perpetuation no earnest observer of their habits can fail to prove. The large auction sales of opossum skins held recently in many towns and cities in the Dominion prove incontestably that enormous numbers of these animals are living in and destroying the native forest. They are also a menace to the very charming native birds. With the passing of the forest will pass the birds whose heritage it is. To the deplorable apathy of the Government of several countries is due the wanton destruction of the scenic loveliness and



beautiful and rare wild life of their country. In the June number of the "Overseas Magazine," Mr. H. J. Massingham, the well-known author, contributes an article entitled "The Passing of Wild Life." "To the wild animals of the world," writes Mr. Massingham, "man has been a very angel of death. For the most striking fact about this holocaust is its wantonness. It has not been utility, danger, or the spread of civilisation that has made a wilderness of the natural world. The vested interests of fashion, the trade of the delicate eater, the big game hunter and his kind that kill with punt-guns and from motors and aeroplanes, it is to these and the like that we owe the destitution of this once teeming world." Mr. Massingham quotes from a fur trade paper as follows:—"The needs of men, coupled with the vanity of women, will soon have destroyed all the beasts of the earth." Unquestionably, "the vested interests of fashion" are the impelling influence of those who are urging the Government to introduce opossums into all areas of virgin forests in New Zealand. I have several times appealed to the Government per medium of leading newspapers during the last thirty years to protect the flora of the native bush and our remarkable birds from the ravages of destructive opossums, deer, wild goats, and wild pigs. Black rats and stoats are, owing to their tree-climbing habits, a daily menace to the native birds inhabiting the forest. How is it possible for the horde of opossums now living in the many areas of native bush in both Islands to subsist therein without materially injuring it? In addition to consuming the seed of many species of the flora of the bush in the green state, they are extremely destructive to the succulent foliage of several species of smaller trees and ferns. Nature lovers and students who cherish the botany and charm of the native bush with its remarkable birds, and there are many, very earnestly appeal to the Government to grant no further licenses to liberate opossums in areas of virgin bush that are now free from these destructive pests.

(Sgd.) W. W. SMITH.

New Plymouth,  
August 13th, 1927.

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## CHILDREN'S PAGE.

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### A WEKA EPISODE.

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(By "MANU.")

A good many years ago, I was one of a party of three who were mining for gold and tin, near the southern end of Stewart Island. It was a lovely spot, far removed from any settlement, but that was a minor drawback; everything else was in our

favour. We had thousands of acres of forest-clad hills, beautiful and rugged scenery, and numbers of native birds. We had a comfortable camp, wood and water handy. Whilst engaged in pitching our camp, we were visited by a pair of woodhens (wekas), and they eventually became part and parcel of our home. Although a bit shy at first, and very much afraid of the dog, they soon found out that we were friendly, and the dog was trained to leave them severely alone. After a time they became very tame, in fact, quite part of the outfit; very jealous of their camp rights, insomuch that they would not allow any other wekas to come near, but, with outstretched wings and sharp cries, would drive them off. Then came a period of partial absence on their part, until they made their appearance one morning with a brood of five young ones, funny little fluffy black chicks. But not for long did we have the chickens with us. One by one they disappeared, until one chick only was left. The wild cats, both numerous and fierce, a legacy left by miners of the great "Tin Rush" days, many years before, must have accounted for them. A good many times I have noticed wekas with only one chick, and blame cats and rats for their destruction. The one chick grew fast, and in time became a lusty youngster, much greyer than the old birds, and always hungry. At that time, we were sluicing in a gully considerably over half a mile from the camp. We had no regular track to the claim, but the way led over a semi-open expanse of peaty ground, clothed with coarse grasses and numerous bushes of stunted bog-pine, the prickly leaved styphelia, and clumps of manuka; and the only indication of a track was our footprints showing here and there in some boggy place. We were, therefore, considerably surprised one day to see our three wekas—father, mother, and chick—bearing down upon us. How they found us out is a mystery, as neither the place—nor the smoke of our fire at dinner-time—could be seen from the camp. Anyhow, there they were, and soon proceeded to have a royal time. Our sluicing operations washed out numbers of large worms; and these, floating down the tail race soon attracted the wekas, which took up their station where the tailrace joined the creek. The parent birds waded into the muddy water and dragged out the worms which they then broke up to feed the youngster. That work went methodically on for quite a long time, until their baby couldn't possibly hold any more. Then they mooned about for a while, taking stock of everything of interest to a woodhen—our coats, the billy, and the tuckerbag—everything in fact—very little escapes the eye of a woodhen. Then they wandered over the ridge, and we found them waiting for us at the camp on our return in the evening. Their trek to the claim then became a daily occurrence, and their stay with us was gradually extended

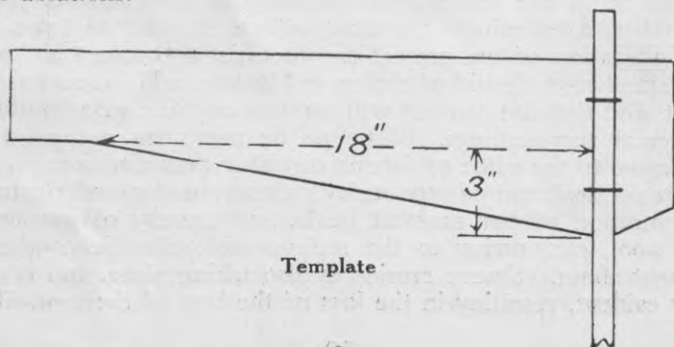
until well on in the afternoon. No doubt their increasing knowledge of the road to take permitted that.

Things went on for some weeks without alteration until we decided to shift camp across the range to the west side in order to work some more promising ground there. Regretfully we said good-bye to our faithful wekas, and I often wondered how long they continued their pilgrimages to a deserted gully, and whether their untutored but active minds ever registered a regret for our departure.

### THE BIRD FOUNTAIN.

There is no greater attraction for birds than a bath or fountain. This should always be placed in the open and elevated on a suitable pedestal to a height of about four feet, otherwise cats will play sad havoc and the birds be disinclined to use the bath as they are particularly easy prey when bathing, and well they know it. Birds will not bathe in foul water, and therefore the bath should be frequently cleansed if not supplied with a continuous flow of water.

The water in the bath should be about three inches deep in the centre, and commence from nothing at the edge. It can quite easily be made by attaching a template or mold, about 18 inches long, fashioned to make the desired shape, to three feet of half-inch piping. Then drive the pipe into soft ground or sand and revolve the template until the shape is formed in the ground. Now raise the template and place about two inches thick of good concrete under it and again revolve the template. This will produce a bath about three feet in diameter. While the concrete is still green any flaws can be filled with sifted sand and cement, and a nice smooth finish can be obtained. The hole in the centre left by the pipe can be fitted with a cork and used to drain out the bath. Place the whole on a pedestal of rough stone cemented together, and you have an ornament fit to grace any lawn and a source of pleasure in watching the birds enjoy their ablutions.



## **SADDLEBACKS.**

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(By W. M. FRASER.)

The wild cat is the worst enemy of the saddleback; and this fact was made very plain to me when watching these birds at work on their island home, with their tails up and heads half-buried in the leaves or rotten wood, too busily engaged searching for grubs to notice the approach of anything; and living as they do half of their time on the ground, it is easy to imagine what an easy prey they must be to a cat. I believe their existence in numbers on this particular island is due to the absence of the cat, and that likewise their disappearance from the mainland and many islands is due to the depredations of this introduced beast. It often makes one feel sick to think of the possibility of some careless fisherman or other person liberating a cat with young on the island; and let us hope the time is not far distant when the people and those in authority will realise the value of our birds, and that the money will not be begrudged to supply competent caretakers to safeguard our heritage from the unthinking and the self-seeking collector.

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## **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE N.Z. NATIVE BIRD PROTECTION SOCIETY.**

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The times change apace, and since the recent great increase in the use of motor vehicles has come about, giving easier access to the country-side and to our forests, with no corresponding stiffening of the enforcement of our conservation laws and with inadequate public education as to the necessity of Nature preservation, our birds and forests are having an increasingly difficult struggle for existence. Other factors, too, have been instrumental in destroying much urban beauty and bird shelter, as, for instance, our extensive hydro-electric schemes. These should be in the end a good reason for forest conservation; otherwise, a lessening water flow will result. Let us hope that the inclination of the present-day motorist to convert all roads into speedways, devoid of charm and beauty, will have a turning point, and that the demand will arise to combine an outing with congenial surroundings. The public mind has not yet been awakened to the value of forests for other than timber uses, and the rapid depletion of our bush is already undoubtedly causing deterioration of our pastoral lands, and thereby of our flocks and wool, etc., owing to the unfavourable climatic conditions brought about. Severe erosion is also taking place, and is now very evident, resulting in the loss of the best of the top soil on

much of our hill country, and the scouring of the river flats in the lowlands. It, however, requires some little study and observation to fully realise these matters; and most people are too much occupied in other ways to give the necessary thought to such subjects.

The Society, with the limited resources at its command, has endeavoured to help to stem the tide of destruction, and has experienced at least a modicum of success. It is felt certain we are operating on the right lines and the only lines that can be successful, that is, the public education out of thoughtlessness into thoughtfulness, or, in other words, conservation by education. It is, moreover, found that the New Zealander is a particularly responsive subject where the question of the preservation of our indigenous birds and forests is concerned; and the Society has thus been enabled to make considerable impression even with the present limited organisation; and it is felt that, if an organisation worthy of the great objects in view were set up, a totally different public outlook would result. Many species of our birds have markedly increased in several districts, including our pigeon, proving that it is only necessary to show good reasons why our birds and forests must be preserved and the public will insist on its being done. Exception must be made in the case of the few; and it is in dealing with these that much stiffening of the law and more drastic penalties are necessary.

The present organisation of the Society has been strained to its fullest capacity, and the incoming committee will, it is hoped, be enabled to increase the facilities for the work.

No. 1 Bird Chart is in course of preparation, and will be issued very shortly free to all colleges and schools in the Dominion. The Education Department has promised £100 towards the cost of this No. 1 Chart, and they have, moreover, been very sympathetic and helpful in matters connected with the design and in the making of arrangements for issuing the chart in a suitable manner.

It is thought these charts, of which it is proposed to produce nine, will have a fine influence on the young, and that the cost, which will be heavy, will thus be warranted. For this purpose it has been necessary to husband our resources, and the Society is pleased to be able to report a credit balance, nearly all of which is required for the enlarged work on hand and in contemplation. With the aid thus given to our resources by those who love our native birds, we shall have bird charts, posters, and other telling methods of inciting public interest. Our credit balance includes a donation of £100 given by the Bruce Trustees, and we have to heartily acknowledge their patriotic sentiment.

It would be unfair to conclude this Report without the recording of the great assistance and co-operation rendered the

cause by the Press, our various representatives, and many of our members throughout the Dominion.

For the Committee,

E. V. SANDERSON,

*Hon. Secretary.*

Wellington, 1st August, 1927.

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## THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF BIRD PROTECTION.

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The object of this organisation is the association of all the bird protection societies and similar leagues in order to unify and strengthen the effort, now growing so freely, to secure protection for useful birds. A great number of societies from many countries, including Britain, the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Sweden, Japan, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Norway, Australia, New Zealand, etc., have already joined the movement, which was inaugurated by Dr. Gilbert T. Pearson, president of the National Association of Audubon Societies of America. It is proposed to hold an international conference in Switzerland this year or early in the coming year.

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## GROWTH OF NEW ZEALAND TIMBER-TREES.

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(By SIR DAVID HUTCHINS.)

Forestry in New Zealand has been misjudged by the entirely erroneous idea that the New Zealand native timber-trees grow more slowly than the ordinary timber-trees of other countries. Statements to that effect are common, but they will not bear critical examination. I find that most of the timber-trees of New Zealand grow faster than the timber-trees of Europe and America—rimu and kauri, the two chief timbers, decidedly faster. As already mentioned, according to the last published returns, the New Zealand timber-trees grow some 50 per cent. faster than two of the chief native timber-trees of South Africa. It is the same story if we compare the growth of New Zealand trees with those of North America, as may be seen by reference to pages 363 to 367 of a recent work on American forestry by Professors Moon and Brown. Nearly all the American timbers grow rather slower than kauri and rimu, some much slower.

The mistake regarding the growth of New Zealand trees has arisen from two causes—(1) Comparing trees such as kauri, rimu, and totara, trees of the dense evergreen forest, which generally grow badly when taken out of the forest, with certain quick-growing exotic trees—*Insignis* pine, eucalypts, and wattles—trees of the open forest, which grow well when planted in the open, and which have been picked for their rapid growth in



countries with much larger forest floras than that of New Zealand. (2.) It has been assumed that the profitable cutting-maturity of New Zealand trees is that at which they are now felled. In the Forest Commission's Report of 1913 is given a somewhat striking figure of the cross-section of a totara tree 8 ft. in diameter, and a diagram is added showing that, from a computation of the rings, it is 416 years old. The conclusion intended to be drawn is that it takes 416 years for a totara to mature. This is very misleading. Thus the Californian redwood in virgin forest lives from 1,300 to 1,750 years (Kent, in "Manual of Coniferae"); but the most profitable cutting-age is somewhere about fifty to eighty years. Douglas fir, again, lives 450 to 750 years in virgin forest, while in English plantations it is cut at forty years.

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### THE OIL MENACE.

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In the House of Commons on 24th February, Captain Garro-Jones asked the Minister of Agriculture if he was aware of the danger to inshore fisheries and deep-sea pelagic fisheries caused by oil pollution, and whether he had taken any steps towards remedying the evil?—Mr. Guinness said that there had been complaints from time to time of damage to inshore fisheries, but evidence of specific damage related more to the fouling of gear than injury to fish. No clear indication was given of injury to fish or marine life generally, but it might arise in coastal waters through oil residue accumulating at the bottom of the sea. There was no evidence as to deep-sea fisheries. The Government hoped that effect would be given to the recommendations of the International Conference by an International Convention signed by all the maritime Powers.

At the meeting of the Kent and Essex Sea Fisheries Committee, at Ramsgate, on 14th March, it was decided to bring forward again the question of the harm done by oil-discharge, at the annual meeting of the Sea Fisheries Committee. They were of opinion that the fixing of a limit, as proposed by the Washington Conference, would not solve the problem, as wind and tide would still carry the oil to the fishing grounds. It was decided to urge instead the use of the "O.K." apparatus on vessels to deal with the oil.

There has been an increase in the number of oiled birds picked up dead and dying on the Kent and Sussex coasts. "Those still alive we kill," writes one correspondent; "it seems the kindest way of putting them out of their misery." The R.S.P.B. Watchers on Dungeness also report that the number of birds washed up has been distressingly large.

According to the "Daily Express," there are some 4,000 oil-



burning ships on the seas, but about forty only have been equipped with oil separators.

One notable step in this direction is the "Majestic," the world's largest liner, which is in dock at Southampton, is now being fitted with a separator. This separator has been constructed to filter 150 tons of oily water in an hour, and it is claimed that the value of the oil it will save in a single transatlantic voyage will be from £100 to £500.

Lieut.-General Sir Edwin Alderson writes in the "Daily Mail" (24th March, 1927) of the sufferings of sea-birds through discharged oil at Folkestone:—

"One of these birds came right ashore. The surf on the pebble beach was hardly perceptible, yet this bird, who could probably defy any ordinary storm, was rolled over and over, and twice drawn back by the undertow.

"Eventually he struggled ashore and stood on the beach. I managed to catch him and found, as I suspected, that his wings and whole plumage were saturated with oil. He was very thin, his breastbone being nearly through his skin. No doubt he was starving, as he could neither fly nor dive properly for his food."

Through the help of the International Council of Women and its president, the Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair, letters from the Federal Council of Australia and from National Councils have appeared in the Melbourne "Argus," the Brisbane "Courier," and other leading papers, calling attention to the grave problem presented by oil pollution and to the leaflet issued by the R.S.P.B. The "Argus" had already commented on the oil on the beaches and wharves of Australia, and the hon. secretary of the Federal Council in a vigorous letter urges that the Federal Government should deal with a question "of importance in the preservation of seabird life, property, and human life.—*Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.*"

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## WILD BIRDS PROTECTION IN ENGLAND.

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The protection of wild birds in England appears to have reached a similar position to that in evidence in New Zealand. A multiplicity of administrative bodies and a corresponding complex number of regulations and rules are hampering the work. A Bill is therefore now before the British House of Commons, aimed mainly at remedying this state of affairs, and making the operations of the collector more difficult and more easily checked. With this in view, the penalty for possessing the skins of birds and eggs is increased. With the object of better advising the authorities, various committees of experts are to be set up. This manner of dealing with collectors' permits has already been suggested to the Minister in charge in this Dominion; but the offer to assist so far has been declined.

## THE GERMAN OWL.

"The sinister note of the German owl heard recently in Christchurch, reminds me that yet another blow has been struck at our native birds."—Extract from a letter by a bird-lover to a Christchurch paper. The letter created considerable interest, and the old controversy concerning the usefulness or otherwise of the bird was renewed. A statement of our present knowledge regarding the bird may be of interest to members.

The Otago Acclimatisation Society introduced the owl from England and Germany with the idea of combating the small bird nuisance. However, in common with so many other efforts at acclimatisation, it is doubtful if the importation was a wise one. Birds from Otago were subsequently liberated in North Canterbury and Rotorua, and they have been definitely reported from various parts of Canterbury recently.

Dealing with its effects on the imported birds, we can say definitely that the owl has had little effect on the prevalence of sparrows, which are undoubtedly our worst small bird pest. The appearance of the owl in a district results in a decrease in the numbers of the open nesting birds, such as thrushes and blackbirds. Philpott has stated:—"Where a pair of owls have established themselves, the evensong of the thrushes and blackbirds gives place to an incessant chorus of terrified notes." Other observers have noted that chaffinches, linnets, and skylarks have been killed by the owl.

With reference to its effect on native birds, at the time of its importation the small birds such as the tomtit, fantail, and grey warbler, were common in Otago, even in the more open settled districts. These birds proved easy prey, and their numbers were rapidly reduced. At the same time, such birds as the sparrows and goldfinches increased in numbers. From what we know of its habits, the German owl does not penetrate the bush very deeply, but prefers the isolated trees on the outskirts, or the shelter provided round the more settled districts. The actual bush birds presumably then do not suffer very much from its depredations, but, as Thomson says:—"There is no doubt that along the outskirts of the bush, it takes heavy toll of the few native birds which still occur in such parts, such as korimakos (bell birds), fantails, and tomtits." Where the owl may have disastrous effects is in the settled districts where such birds as the fantail, bell bird, grey warbler, and tomtit are found.

Now it is well known that our smaller native birds provide easy prey, and the chances are that the depredations amongst the natives will be greater proportionately than among the introduced birds. It is surely better that a few sparrows should be allowed to live than that even one native small bird should be slaughtered. It will thus be seen that the German owl appears to

be doing the very opposite to that which was anticipated, as its work gives an increase in sparrows and a decrease in desirable insect eating birds, and the evidence can be seen in the appeal to the authorities for help to combat insect plagues, etc.—L. W. McCaskill.

The New Zealand Native Bird Protection Society is a league of citizens, representing every locality from the Three Kings to Stewart Island, banded together to advocate the preservation of our heritage. Its endeavour is to awaken public interest in the value both economically and aesthetically of our birds and forests. With a united public opinion and with a public well informed as to the methods necessary to pursue in the conservation of our unrivalled heritage, New Zealand can stand alone at the head of all as an example of what can be achieved by an intelligent people. We are the followers of no party, creed, or sect, and we invite one and all to join with us in this endeavour. Our subscription, which is almost nominal, is: Endowment members, £1; ordinary members, 5s.; school children, 1s. Ninety-five per cent. of our income is devoted to issuing informative literature.

The following are the officers at the head of the Society's affairs:—

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