

thumped on his perch, upsetting him, that he eventually took fright. At that, he only flew fifty yards or so to another perch, from where he regarded me suspiciously, cocking his head first on one side and then on the other.

Another fact will further show their boldness. A neighbour had a hen with a dozen chickens which one by one disappeared. Traps failing to catch stoats or other vermin, the blame was laid on a German owl. Deciding to shoot it, our neighbour accordingly waited in the vicinity of the coop one moonlight night, his gun barrel projecting in front of him. For some time he waited, with his eyes fixed on the surrounding trees. At last, tiring of his steady watching he chanced to look down, and beheld the very bird he was hunting perched on the barrels of his gun. Although never witnessing anything like this, I have many times seen them alight within a few feet of me.

A peculiar fact about them is that at first moreporks appeared to hold sway in the bush. Then the owls appeared in hundreds and the moreporks disappeared. Now again the owls appear to be dying out, while the moreporks are again making their appearance. To give an example of the owls that lived in one small patch of bush. While returning from school one night, myself and a few companions were invited over to witness the falling of a giant red pine. The crash of that grand tree as it fell was a sight never to be forgotten. Perhaps more so, however, was that of scores of startled owls, which swarmed everywhere, making the bush ring with their wild whistling. Indeed there must have been hundreds of them, for they were visible everywhere, and others could be heard on all sides. During that period I only once heard the sad cry of a morepork. Now they are quite plentiful, while the owls are fast disappearing.

The owls themselves are not hard to catch. Using an ordinary rabbit trap, they can be trapped very easily at the mouths of old rabbit burrows in clay banks. If there are any trees nearby this method usually proves very successful. They can usually be shot among the burnt stumps and fallen bush. Using a light shotgun a surprising number can often be taken. There is some peculiar attraction for the owls among the moss-covered fallen trunks. Perhaps it is the grubs and beetles that are usually to be found among the same that attract them. Perhaps, and of the two I think the latter by far the more probable, it is the fact that their colour blends so perfectly with that of the logs that they adopt it as a natural means of safety.

Having no enemies, it seems very probable that these birds will naturally increase. If such be the case, our smaller native birds are doomed. Perhaps stoats account for a few owls, but even those blood-thirsty little killers as a general rule show caution as to what they attack. Harrier hawks probably destroy