

## AUGUST . . . AND THE SILVEREYES.

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By HUGH ROSS of Invercargill.—Junior Member.

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Silvereyes! They are everywhere—hundreds of them. New Zealand farm houses are besieged by a multitude of winged beings.

Green birds cluster round the doorways, flock in scores to the turnip-fields in search of blight, swarm upon the fruit trees, long since stripped of their autumn harvest, cling to the rose bushes, stripping them of the green pests which prey upon the delicate shoots, gather in dismal groups upon the lawn—a mute appeal to the fact that August is here, that the forest is barren of food . . . that the birds need feeding.

Strangely enough there was not a silvereye near our place on the last day of July, yet the following morning they were fluttering everywhere waiting to be fed. I provided them with suet, apples, rendered fat, scraps from the table, shallow dishes of skim milk and a small dish of thin honey.

The result was amazing. A few of the less timid approached first, encouraging their companions, then more came, more, and still more, until upwards of five or six hundred fluttered round the boxes, upon which I had placed the food, struggling and fighting for positions, while one and all enjoyed the feast of a lifetime.

For perhaps ten minutes they fed more or less in peace, then free-for-all fights started. One vivacious, although somewhat emaciated bird, appeared to be the ringleader. The havoc which this little chap wrought was colossal. Boldly approaching a group of feasting birds he would immediately attack his nearest neighbour, the confusion which followed frightening all the others away. One by one they returned only to be repelled by the victorious warrior, who, using the box as a kind of fighting table, would carry on the battle with remorseless intensity. Soon, however, a newcomer would alight on the box, and, facing his opponent with quivering wings, wide-open beak and slightly raised top-not would invite the other to combat. For as long as three minutes they would face one another, then one would attack. While the battle waged the others would return to their interrupted meal, one timid, very fat fellow, feasting in great style in order to make amends for lost time.

For about ten days the Silvereyes honoured us with their presence, during which time they became very domesticated and friendly; it was no infrequent occurrence to have them perch