

The only silver-eyes we saw were clustered in willow-trees on the Ashburton River; we heard their peculiar plaintive cries and saw them clinging to the branches in every acrobatic attitude conceivable as they feasted on blight.

We believed that the presence of the silver-eyes meant a storm for a certainty. We therefore pitched our tent and fly with unusual care. During the night it rained, and the following morning one of the worst hailstorms in years swept over Ashburton. It was followed by several days of boisterous weather. Then it was that the green birds clustered around our doorway, eagerly accepting the bread and scraps with which we fed them. Hunger and cold made them indifferent to our presence, and we were provided with endless amusement by a score of them feasting and fighting at the tent door.

Much to my surprise I noticed several young ones among them. The sturdy youngsters appeared to have endless appetites, and eagerly ate everything their hard-working emaciated parents carried to them. The silver-eyes apparently nest in the willows on the Canterbury river banks.

To me quite the most wonderful sight was at Oamaru. We returned home in the train, and no sooner had it stopped at that station than a large number of sea-mews came flying across from the sea, only a few chains distant, and alighted beside the carriages. Eagerly expectant they ran up and down. Presently the passengers began to feed them with crusts and pieces of cake. How those birds did fight over the tit-bits! A few of the more agile ones deftly caught the morsels on the wing as they were thrown, and then flew swiftly away to enjoy their feast in peace, free from the onsets of less fortunate mates. I shall never forget those gulls which, tame as pigeons, apparently eagerly await the coming of the train and the feast that they know will be given to them.

A week later we were once more camped in the bush south of Balclutha. A flock of small birds surrounded us. We were happy, and more than ever it was impressed upon us that he who has birds for companions, especially where they are the glorious songsters of New Zealand, is indeed heaven-blessed.