

THE MOREPORK. RURU.

Ninox novaeseelandiae.

It is not until twilight that the morepork becomes active. But all through the night it is ever on the hunt, especially if there be moonlight to enable clearer sight of the prey. Most people know the cry of "mopoke" or "morepork" repeated at frequent intervals and sometimes with great rapidity, but it has other notes such as "kon kon" and "kree kree."

Mainly because of the bird's habit of ejecting from the crop castings containing the indigestible parts of its food, the diet of the morepork is well known. Cicadas, beetles, moths, and wetas are regularly eaten. Among the moths most commonly taken are the adults of the "caterpillar" and "army worm," which do so much damage to grass paddocks, farm crops, and lawns. On occasion the smaller native and introduced birds frequenting the bush or other haunts of the morepork are killed and eaten and even fed to the young, but such is the exception rather than the rule.

The development of a taste for rats and mice, a feature of owls in other countries, is one of the most useful accomplishments of the morepork. It is mainly because of the presence of these rodents that the bird is attracted to farm buildings.

Watching a morepork hunting at night is a weird experience because of the complete absence of noise. Unlike the chattering fantail or the chiming bellbird, the morepork takes its food in silence, and the flight, though comparatively rapid, is noiseless because the feathers of the wings have downy margins which muffle the sound.

The nest is often found in a hollow tree. Other sites are the holes underneath arching roots, the cavity resulting from the wrenching off of a branch, a mossy shelf on the trunk of some huge tree, a bed of needles in the fork of a pine—nearly always deep in the bush to obtain that filtered shade so much desired in the daytime. The two eggs are almost spherical, white, smooth, and glossy. The young are at first slate grey, their appearance made the more peculiar because of the unusually small heads. In about a week the first feathers are replaced by pure white fluffy down. The adults supply the young with food similar to their own, except that in the case of mice and birds the flesh is first torn into small pieces. Often food is stored near the nest, so that meals are readily available.

Although at night the approach of a morepork will put any bush bird to flight, the smaller birds will often pay back old scores during the day. A foraging bellbird or tui may detect the natural