

THE WHITE KIWI.

(By James Cowan)

That rare bird, a white kiwi, is not quite so strange or scarce a bird as most people imagine. A newspaper paragraph which went the rounds recently, one paper after another copying it, stated that evidence that a white kiwi "probably lived within the last twenty years" was disclosed in the existence of a valuable garment in the possession of a Rotorua woman; it has white kiwi feathers woven into it. This was regarded as very wonderful and rare.

However, not only are such white birds well known to the Maori and referred to in legends, but their existence in quite recent times is within the knowledge of some of us. There is one on the Little Barrier Island native bird sanctuary, or was within the last five years or so. A former custodian of the island, the late Mr. Nelson, reported that he has seen it several times. On one occasion he "got a good look at it by the light of the full moon." It is an albino bird caught in the Taupo country and taken to the island. Maori folk lore of the Tongariro-Taupo region invests white birds, whether tui or pigeon or kiwi, with an aura of sanctity, infringement of which has brought dread penalties "Should a man kill a white bird in the bush in these parts," an old man of Ngati-Tuwharetoa said to me, "he would be punished by the spirits of the forest and the mountain. Te Ririo, the demon god, would come for him at night and carry him off into the wild lands, and if he survived to reach his home and people again he would be demented, speaking a strange tongue."

The lone albino of Hauturu bird sanctuary appeared to have struck friendly acquaintance with the brown kiwis of the island. At any rate, one day, Mr. Nelson, when travelling up a gully, saw a young vari-coloured kiwi; its head feathers were white, its back and breast brown, its legs light yellow, and the hinder parts white. "It looked pretty," he wrote in his report. In the following year he reported that the albino putative parent of this feathered piebald—the Spanish "pinto" would sound better—was still alive and very healthy.

On the West Coast of the South Island a white kiwi has more than once been caught. In the Taranaki bush, too, the "kiwi-tea" is known.

Not So Very Rare.

About fifteen years ago a Taranaki sawmiller of my acquaintance, a Stratford man, caught a pure-white kiwi in a bush he was working, many miles inland towards the head waters of the Waitara River. He brought it into his home in Stratford and kept it in a box. It was fed with worms; it kept the family hard at work digging to supply its daily wants. Presently, the Zoo authorities in Wellington heard about it, and a request was sent for it, for the Newtown Park collection. Also it was illegal for any private person to be in possession of a live kiwi. The Stratford man shrewdly opined that if he sent the rare bird to Wellington it would presently be in a glass case in the museum. "To hell with them," he said; "they're not going to get this fellow to mope to death in their zoo. Back to the bush he goes." He took the bird out to the wilds again and liberated him.

The "kiwi-tea" may be there still, or there may be sundry "pintos" roving the bush. By the way, that Maori expression for a white kiwi is the name painted on the bows of a red-funnel collier trading between Wellington and the West Coast. "Kiwitea" here is a misnomer, for the steamer is as black as the coal she carries.

Spotted Kiwi.

