

FOUR PROBLEMS.

FIGHT TO SAVE ALBATROSS CHICK.

Bird-protectors have to move in a mysterious way their mercies to perform.

Problem No. 1: A ground-nesting bird, a very large and unusual bird, comes to breed on a foreshore headland. Its nest stands at once in great danger from the inquisitive and from the vandalistic. Shall the bird-protectors take the public into their confidence, and appeal to people's sense of good conduct? Or shall the bird-protectors try to prevent knowledge of the nest, and thus avoid the rush and crush of sight-seers?

Problem No. 2: When the bird-protectors have decided to make an effort at secrecy, their first job is to silence the press. This can sometimes be done, locally. But when newspapers in other cities publish, through local correspondents, stories of such a rare nesting event, the local newspapers naturally demand equal or greater publicity.

The bar against secrecy having been thus broken down, no further effort at suppression is of any value. It becomes known then that thoughtless or barbaric people have driven away two out of four pairs of royal albatrosses that were courting on a coastal hillside on the northern tip of Otago Peninsula, that stone-throwers have broken the nest and the single egg of the third pair, and that the fourth pair have left behind a single chick, whose natural

destiny is to sit on the hillside for many months before flight, if the inquisitive and the vandals will allow him to sit there.

Problem No. 3: The lone chick having become such a popular "story" that he is seldom alone, the third problem is how to protect him. The answer is: a man-proof fence. As the ground is a public reserve, with friendly lighthouse keepers and a friendly Harbour Board, a plan for a fence, approved by the authorities, is made without great difficulty. It is believed that, with a fence and warning notices, the chick can be protected from the public for the remainder of its infancy; and that there will be less occasion for one of its unofficial protectors to stand-by on Saturdays and Sundays, when the sightseers mostly congregate.

But there is always a but—that leads up to:

Problem No. 4: which is a problem of money. The fence will cost about £50. The local bird-protectors, prodigal of time as well as money, are not daunted. They will face the job. But can the rest of New Zealand allow them to do it at their own cost in cash as well as time? Is it not a duty—a privilege—for other bird-protectors to help?

The Hon. Secretary of the Otago Branch of the Royal Society of New Zealand, Mr. H. D. Skinner, writes to the Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand: "We are fortunate in having the sympathy and active co-operation of the Otago Harbour Board and its staff in measures which will lead to the exclusion of unauthorised persons from the whole of the Taiaroa Head reserve on which the albatrosses are attempting to form a colony. This can be done by erecting a barbed-wire fence and gate," etc.

The attempts of the birds to found an albatross colony at the spot have been in progress for at least eighteen years, and eggs have been laid, but yahoos have intervened. Mr. George Simpson wrote in June to the Forest and Bird Protection Society: "The chick is lying out in the open (on a much-used path when people are about) and if it is interfered with by irresponsibles, or is unnecessarily crowded round when the parents return to feed it, the chances of its survival are small. That the

Royal Albatross on Nest at Otago Heads.

Photo courtesy L. W. McCaskill.]

