

WHO ARE THE BIRDS FRIENDS?

By Anonymous, in "The Countryman."

PHOTOGRAPHERS, like other people, vary, and unless they take extreme care in building their hides and in trimming, if necessary, they may cause the birds to forsake. Most of us have had tragedies of this kind, but the true bird lover and observer has few after he has gained experience—and even before—provided he takes extreme care from the outset by watching the birds' reactions.

The anti-photographers say that if a nest is opened up it may cause the birds' enemies to find and destroy it. This may be true in some instances, but if there is any risk of it, the nest should be covered again each time it is worked. I do as little 'gardening' as possible, and often a hide may be a deterrent to such birds as jays and others; but I feel that most of the enemies from which bird life suffers are such good nesters that even the most secluded sites are not immune from them. I have found that mice, etc., are responsible for many tragedies.

Many over-keen bird-watchers (especially when they go about in parties) do more to cause the birds to forsake than any number of photographers. After all, it is the one thing we want to avoid if we are to get results.

The remark I once heard that the true friend of birds is the person who does not know anything about them and takes no interest in them probably hits the nail on the head.

A CAUTION—by *Seaton Gordon*

AS little 'gardening' as possible should be done: the cutting of the herbage, etc., is rarely justified. If the surroundings be pressed down with the hand, or pegged down if on the ground, or tied out of the way if in a tree or a bush, the photographer can restore the original appearance, and the bird will almost certainly return when the photographer has left.

I feel that many bird photographers are too anxious to rush things—they set the hide near the nest at once instead of moving it up gradually; they expose the nest while the bird is still nervy because of their strange activities. If the photographer treats the bird with consideration, moves his hide gradually nearer the nest, and does not expose the bird all at once to anxieties, there is little chance of her forsaking. But how many bird photographers take the trouble—or can spare the time—to do this?

PASTORAL LANDS

Excessive Grazing and Burning Off

THE chief cause of deterioration of high country grassland areas in the South Island and in some inland parts of Hawke's Bay is the absence of any regulation of grazing. Excessive burning over of grassland is also a major factor in the exposure of large areas to erosion and desiccation. It has long been apparent here that the totally unrestricted unscientific methods of the large pastoralists have caused serious deterioration of very considerable areas of tussock land. The sheep graziers have dealt with millions of acres of hill country after their own primitive methods, with the result that the roots of the native grass have been damaged and destroyed by annual or more frequent burning-off to induce new growth. Overgrazing by sheep has ruined several large runs covering watersheds, and floods and erosion are among the results of such ignorant methods of pastoralists.

It is fitting to refer here to a recent announcement that cattle grazing is to be tried as an experiment on a large area of deteriorated land which has been reduced to non-usable condition by prolonged over-stocking with sheep and by repeated burning-off. But as this country is a watershed several thousands of feet above sea level, where Marlborough and Nelson provinces meet, it would seem wiser to leave it alone and let it revert to bush and other vegetation as a protective forest area. All such misused high country will restore itself in time if it is simply left alone.

That is the course which seems advisable in some of the higher, broken parts of Hawke's Bay and Poverty Bay, where ill-judged clearing-off of timber and so-called scrub has made such a mess of the hills with landslips and erosion that grows worse every year. A high engineering authority at Gisborne gave it as his opinion after the floods of last year that it was advisable to let a large area of the despoiled back country revert to bush and assist the progress with a programme of reafforestation. That advice may well be applied to many other parts of New Zealand.