

LITTLE IMMIGRANTS

by David Gregorie

New Zealand is a long way from anywhere else. It takes a long time to get here no matter how you come.

The first people to come here were the Maoris. It probably took them about three weeks to get here from the islands of the eastern Pacific in their big sailing canoes. They were the first human immigrants.

That was about a thousand years ago. Since then a great many human immigrants have come here from Britain and Ireland, Scandinavia and Yugoslavia, China and India, and the Pacific Islands.

Many of our native birds and animals are immigrants too. Birds, bats and insects sometimes get caught in the howling westerly gales that blow from Australia across the Tasman Sea. Most of them keep flying until they are exhausted and then fall into the sea. A few of them manage to struggle on until they reach New Zealand, tired but alive.

But their troubles are not over. They are in a strange country with strange plants and animals. How can they know what is safe to eat?

They are often alone. And if they cannot find mates of their own kind there will be no young ones to keep the species going. But sometimes flocks of birds of the same kind arrive together. Then, if conditions are right, they might breed and spread all over the country.

Most people are surprised to learn how many of our native birds arrived in this way from Australia. Some of them came so long ago that they were here when the Maoris arrived.

Other birds have settled in New Zealand only in the last few years. Before 1950 welcome swallows were hardly ever seen in New Zealand. Sometimes a stray bird would find its way here from Australia, but that was all. Since 1950 these pretty little birds have been spreading rapidly and now they are quite common in most areas.

White-eyes arrived here about the same time as the first pakeha immigrants — about 140 years ago. The Maoris called the new birds tauhou, or stranger. Now they are one of the commonest birds we have.

Birds from Australia you may see or hear every day include fantails, harrier hawks, pukekos, kingfishers, moreporks, black shags and grey ducks. Others you may see less often include white-fronted herons, Australian coots, banded rails, spur-winged plovers and bitterns. There are many more.

Little blue penguins probably emigrated from here to Australia.

Red-billed gulls live in Australia and South Africa as well as New Zealand. Black backed gulls live in all the countries

around the Southern Ocean. Gannets and caspian terns can be found all over the world.

The wonderful white heron, the kotuku of the Maoris, is so common in Australia that Australians wonder why we think it is so special.



A kingfisher glares at the photographer who interrupted his lunch.

Photograph L. J. Richards, Wildlife Service.

A white-eye fluffs its feathers to keep out the cold in Whiteman's Valley near Wellington.

Photograph Brian Enting.

