

### BIRDS I HAVE MET

## 22. Korimako . . . the bellbird

by Avis Acres

Bellbirds were quite common in Taupo during the nineteen-fifties, in fact they outnumbered the tuis in some areas. The kowhai trees which grew abundantly round the lake attracted large numbers when they flowered in the spring. The berries and flowers of the native fuchsia and flax also supplied korimako with food. The tell-tale stain of orange pollen from the flax flowers and vivid blue from the fuchsia on their heads always indicated where they had been feeding. Another popular rendez-vous for korimako and her friends was a certain redgum tree on the lake shore, close to the main shopping centre. I remember, once, counting over sixty bellbirds in that tree when it was blooming.

I had settled down beneath it to paint the lake in oils but was so fascinated by the antics of the bellbirds as they twisted their bodies in their efforts to extract honey from the flowers, I abandoned the oil painting and spent the morning sketching korimako. In Taupo gardens the belligerent tui usually took possession of a kowhai tree and drove the smaller bellbird away but on Kapiti Island the bellbird and tui appeared to live together quite amicably, sharing the nectar trough by the care-taker's cottage and also the rata tree which was a seething mass of

bellbirds and tuis when it was flowering. Tempers then become rather frayed as they fought for their share of honey.

My first experience of the bellbirds' chimes was during a visit to Lake Waikaremoana when I heard the wonderful dawn chorus. I was awakened about 5 a.m. by a tui, then a robin and a few chimes from korimako, then all round the lake the chiming echoed from the steep bush-covered hillsides. Hundreds of bellbirds joined in the chorus almost drowning the lovely song of toutouwai, the robin and the tuis. It was the most glorious melody I had ever heard.

When I visited Kapiti Island I was again enchanted by the dawn chorus and the chiming of the bellbirds. The late Mr Wilkinson of Kapiti describes it as "The peeling and tinkling of finely-tuned silver bells." I agree with his statement that "No words can convey the beauty or the astounding volume coming from such tiny throats." Captain Cook and Sir Joseph Banks were also most impressed and Banks described it as "The most melodious wild music he had ever heard." The chiming is only heard at daybreak and only lasts about ten minutes but their song continues during the day.

Bellbirds were quite common at Kapiti

This is the last of Avis Acres' "Birds I have met" because she tells me she has said quite enough about these birds over all these years. I am sure we are all sorry. The Society thanks her for all the amusing and interesting articles she has supplied for the Junior Section for so long. *The Editor.*

and I had plenty of time to study them while they fed at the nectar trough. They were much smaller than the tui with olive green plumage and a purple sheen on their heads and yellowish olive sides. The iris was red, black bill and grey feet. The female was smaller and duller in colour with a white streak below the eye, and yellowish fawn under parts. Quills and tail feathers are brownish-black, the tail is forked.

Three or four pinkish-white eggs, blotched in reddish-brown are laid between September and January in a nest of twigs, rootlets and moss. It is lined with bright green or red feathers from the parakeet or kaka. Both parents feed the chicks, first with nectar and later with insects. The family leave the nest in about 14 days but are fed by their parents for the next ten days.

The brown rat is the greatest enemy, climbing low trees and killing nestlings. Korimako is very helpful destroying insects and spreading pollen and seeds. Long may this attractive little songster stay with us.

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