



"LOOKY, MA, it's that man Sorensen again"—Auckland Island shags in their rookery. The bird in the foreground is vainly trying to cover three chicks, each almost as big as herself. At right: J. H. SORENSSEN



## Wild Life in the Sub-antarctic

# Residents and Stragglers

(Written for "The Listener" by J. H. SORENSSEN)

THE plant formations of the Aucklands and the Campbells differ greatly. The climate is much the same, but the larger size of the Aucklands group permits the rata or ironwood to grow abundantly. Some other woody shrubs common to southern New Zealand are found there too, and it is the southern limit of the treeferns. The Campbells support no trees and only three woody shrubs of any size. One of these is not found elsewhere.

In consequence, the Auckland Islands have a much richer forest-inhabiting bird fauna. Tuis, bellbirds, parakeets, tomtits and bush-hawks live there, none of them being found farther to the south, although a parakeet used to be found on the Macquaries. Farther north, the Snares have a small number of land-birds but the small size of the group does not allow of its being forest-clad; only low shrubs exist there.

One land-bird which used to be common on both the Auckland and Campbell Islands is the ground-lark or pipit. To-day it is rarely seen on the Campbells and, if breeding at all, must do so on outlying islands. Just what caused its destruction is not quite certain. There are a few wild cats but they, too, are not common. Brown rats, descendants of escapees from visiting ships of the past, however, are only too plentiful, and a ground-nesting bird like the pipit would have little chance of rearing a clutch with these active marauders about. The pipits are plentiful on the Auckland Islands and so tame that they can almost be caught by hand.

Another fairly common bird on the Aucklands is the so-called "flightless duck." Actually this small brown duck can fly a little but is so rarely seen to do so and has such short, stubby wings that it is almost flightless. It frequents the kelp beds about islands and sheltered coasts. A flightless duck was reported from Campbell Island and many years ago a specimen was secured. Subsequent observers failed to find the duck on the island and the original record was doubted. It was considered that the record must be based on a wrongly-labelled bird from the Aucklands. The party on Campbell Island in 1944 re-discovered the flightless duck but it is not common.

Grey ducks are found on both islands and, as there are few freshwater

ponds on either, are to be found mostly around the harbour sides where they feed on marine crustaceans. Their numbers are not great and skua gulls attack and catch many of the ducklings when they take to the water.

## Shags and Gulls

Common to both islands are the shags. They are different specifically, but not greatly different in appearance or habits. The plumage of the underside is satiny-white and of their back a lovely dark shade of greenish-blue. On the facial area there is much dark red, and orange-to-yellow colouring. There is a crest on the head, and in the breeding season long white filoplumes are developed on the neck and thighs. Shags' nests are constructed on eroded ledges on steep cliffs, and are usually very hard to get near. On the Aucklands some of the colonies can be reached with ease, but on the Campbells all are quite inaccessible by any ordinary means.

A peculiar sight about the islands are the "rafts" of shags—up to 50 or more birds in one place on the water so that, at a distance, they appear like a small island. As if at a pre-arranged signal, the birds will dive and when they reappear may be widely scattered. Nevertheless they once again form up into their "raft."

Sea-leopards prey on the shags during the time they are about the sub-antarctic islands and are often seen skinning their catches in the waters of the harbours, with a gathering of gulls overhead on the look out for fragments from the meal. The sea-leopard skins the shag, or indeed, penguins or other sea-birds they catch, by shaking the bird vigorously until the skin tears apart. Even before one can see that it is a sea-leopard coming along with a meal one can be sure that such is the

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