

# NORTH BY EAST TO THE BAY

BECAUSE it is easier in a high wind to go through mountains than over the top I entered Hawke's Bay through the Manawatu Gorge and in an hour

began to wonder what the stock were living on. In fact they were living very well, partly because stock which have enough shade and water do well in summer if they have been well fed in winter, and partly because droughts are seldom as dry as they appear. There was a certain amount of rough growth that would keep cattle going if they had troughs and ponds; but it was tinder and not grass. There was probably on southern slopes some grass that still had moisture in it, and substance. But none of that could be seen from the road. From Dannevirke all the way to Bay View, where the road north enters hills again, it looked like a second drought on top of a first, weeks without rain in 1947 following months without rain in 1946; but no farmer seemed worried. It was a normal Hawke's Bay summer, I was told, a little drier than stock-owners liked, but not at all disturbing. Rain would come in a week or two, and when it did the whole countryside would be green again and the situation safe for the rest of the year.

And the rain did come. It came in inches and not in points, with wind lashing the trees, and every creek running bank high. But among the adventurers we commonly call farmers I think some of the most cool-headed live in Hawke's Bay, facing droughts and floods if they are sheep-farmers, and gales and frosts if their hope is in fruit, and never quite sure which one to guard against.

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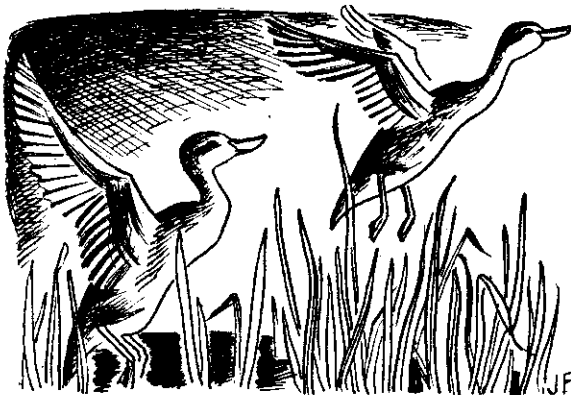
EVERY schoolboy knows why the east coast of New Zealand is drier and hotter than the west coast, but no one knows when the east is going to

refuse to be east and behave like the west.

**WHEN EAST IS NOT EAST** I spent three weeks in the Wairarapa in September and remember only three good days. In October I circled Ruapehu in sunshine and dust and had rain all the way back to Wellington. November and December brought me winter in the winterless north—four hot days in Hokianga County, rain and blustering gales nearly everywhere else. January was spent in Wellington, and when I left at the end of the month for the East Coast it was so cold in Palmerston North that I regretted having to spend a night there. Then I drove through the gorge and was sure when I was crossing the Takapau plain that heat and dust would follow me all the way to East Cape. In fact the heat lasted just long enough to make a fool of me for the *nth* time—put me into drills at Hastings, and shorts and sandals at Gisborne, and at Tolaga Bay left me so suddenly that I had goose-flesh for nearly a week. It was the end of my last North Island illusion, and I

am ashamed to think I had clung to it for 50 years.

It can of course be dry in Poverty Bay and hot along the East Coast. It can be nearly as dry at Clyde and as hot as Alexandra. But it is neither one nor the other normally. It is as hot as Nelson and as dry as Marlborough, with a sea breeze two days in three and a land breeze three nights in four. It made my Wellington mouth water to see grapes growing and ripening in the open, passion fruit hanging on fences and verandahs, oranges, lemons, mandarines, and limes sharing orchards with persimmons and Chinese gooseberries. I had never before seen such crops of maize or eaten so much sweet corn, known how good rock melons can be, or eaten water melons in New Zealand



"The extreme wariness of the birds"

straight off New Zealand ground. It is hardly New Zealand at all between Gisborne and Hick's Bay once you get your shelter belts established and your garden hedges. But it is New Zealand before you do that, and when I saw the Waiapu river playing the same tricks as the Ashley, shingle fans in the gullies, and trees blown down in old plantations, I felt that I had not wandered very far from Canterbury. Then when I reached Cape Runaway I discovered that the water pipes freeze in winter.

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I SHOULD like to know that the day will come when Tutira will be a sacred lake; not merely a picnic place but a place of pilgrimage. Already in

## TUTIRA

my reckless moments I think that it will be such a place, but I don't know. I know that it had hundreds of visitors this summer, some of whom knew its history vaguely. On the last Saturday in January it was visited by nearly every farmer living within 20 miles of it, with his wife and family and hired hands. Some of them some day will realise where they went. Others will come through all the summers ahead, and in 2040 perhaps, or a little later, when Guthrie-Smith has been a century dead, the blood of one traveller in a hundred thousand will flow a little faster the first time he sees that peaceful sheet of water.

But it is still only 1947, and Tutira is just a pleasant stretch of water edged with willows that Napier and Hastings motorists can reach in an easy hour. It is far more beautiful than I thought it would be, in itself and in its setting, and I always find it exciting to see a

notice proclaiming a sanctuary for birds. Sanctuary is of course a moving word anywhere, a place where life is sacred and safe, but as birds are almost the only game I have never hunted, their sanctuaries are the only refuges I can welcome without humbug. I knew that Tutira was safe for birds before I went there, but I was not prepared in advance for the extreme wariness of the birds and their insignificant numbers. I hope I am wrong about the numbers—that for every swan I saw there were ten others, and for every grey duck and teal a hundred others; but if I am right the situation is a little depressing. It means either that sanctuaries are only relatively safe from man or that they are specially easy marks for hawks, weasels, stoats, and cats.

It is, I think, natural justice that a sanctuary for one bird should be a sanctuary for all birds, even if some are native and some imported. In any case I could not justify my annoyance when I watched two hawks working a patch of raupo all morning and swooping at intervals at something I could not see but could easily enough guess at. Nothing was taken while I was actually looking: I would hear a splash, angry squawks, and a flurry of wings, then see the hawks soaring up again empty-footed. But their persistence was not mere stupidity. Sooner or later it would have its reward, and the turn of the weasels would come a few hours later. I could not doubt that some of the sudden cries I heard in the middle of the night, confused and agitated and solitary, meant death to one bird and silent terror to the others. But in this matter, too, I may have been wrong. I suppose birds can behave in bed very much as we ourselves do—crowd one another, call out angrily for more room, dig one another in the ribs, and emerge unhurt and innocent-looking the next morning. If I could accept that explanation I very cheerfully would.

One odd feature about the concentration of the hawks on the raupo patches was the fact that it was quite unnecessary. Rabbits seemed to be extremely numerous all round the lake and to have relatively little cover. I counted a dozen once within 50 or 60 yards, not all old and wary, but from half-grown down to innocents of three or four weeks. Why should hawks spend their time trying to snatch ducklings out of protected water (in addition to the cover there were the beaks and wings of the old birds) when there was so much easy meat on the hillsides?

But the point I set out to make was that hawks are birds, too. Whatever was the case once, they are to-day a factor in the balance of nature that will not be removed. I think sanctuaries must remain as safe as we can make them against men, but never safer than that except for special and passing reasons. Tutira has far fewer birds of all kinds than I expected to see there; but I hope we shall never see it black with ducks and swans (except in the shooting season) artificially protected against all rivals. Let our sanctuaries become places where life goes on very much as it would if we were not here at all: life and death and change and perpetual adaptation.

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