

# THE EGG CAME AFTER THE CHICK

BY the time breakfast was over the excitement of all hands was intense and the plans for the day were unfolded. We were to make a detailed search of the whole valley and, by walking abreast some distance apart, get a count of the number of birds, of the fresh nests of the present season, and also of the old nests in the area. Anything else of note would be observed by the individual searchers and duly recorded.

It was a glorious morning and the lake glimmered in the sunshine, keas called from the limestone bluffs, bush birds chirruped as we passed. Few deer have made their way into this part of the country and it was, in consequence, largely unspoiled. Strict silence could not be observed and, in any case, we wished to flush birds from the tussock in order to get our census as accurately as possible. We had, also, to call out to the central observers with the notebooks any comment on nests found, and so on. But our first job was to release the chick captured earlier. As soon as "junior" was taken from his carton he gave a loud cheep and was as promptly answered by the parent bird, which had been concealing itself silently in the tussock as we approached. This delightful bird came back within a few feet of us and all hands were given a really close look at an adult bird.

IN our last issue J. H. SORESENSEN described the discovery of the first notornis chick which, contrarily, made its appearance before the egg. A notornis egg, however, was discovered, and another colony of birds as well. In this second article, Mr. Sorensen describes these equally exciting events.

And what a picture it made in the morning sunlight. Those who had hitherto doubted the peacock blues and greens of the plumage, together with the vivid red of the beak, seen on the museum specimen in Dunedin and in various illustrations, were satisfied. The colouration of the bird in life was even more glorious. Cameras clicked and movie machines whirled, notes were taken, and an excited buzz of conversation went on all around. The chick obligingly peeped, the parent called lustily, and another bird, presumably the mate, gave warning calls from a distance but seldom appeared. Finally the chick was released and in a twinkling was lost to sight in the tussock. The adults, too, were now quietened, and we pursued our way along the tussock slopes on the side of the lake.

## First Takahe Egg

Soon the calls of "nest-fresh" or "nest-old" were heard from various quarters, and more birds were sighted. Several adults were captured and measured and our stock of information concerning them continued to grow. And

then came another thrill, and it seemed only fit and proper that our genial host and leader, Dr. Orbell, should get it first. One bird was flushed from a nest and examination of the nest revealed an egg. We had not dared to hope that an egg would be found so late in the season; but here it was. Dr. Falla had predicted what a takahe egg would look like, basing his deduction on a knowledge of the allied pukeko. He was correct. The egg was a pinkish stone colour with light and dark brown blotches all over it. Again the cameras clicked and the movies whirled and, rather reluctantly one must admit, the egg was replaced in the nest and our task continued. As with the chick, this must have been the first egg ever beheld, at least by Europeans, though the old-time Maori must have seen them.

## The Search Goes On

In the afternoon the head of the valley was reached and then the return trip made and further observations taken. There was an air of excitement about the camp that night which even physical

tiredness could not dispel: kiwis called across the valley and from the beech forest behind, but the one topic was still "takahe."

Breakfast was early again to allow time for a further trip into country not touched before and also to climb a ridge to see if any likely country existed in the next valley to the south. Three of our party could not stay any longer; two were to do a circuit of the open "tops" to report on vermin; five of us went up the valley again. More birds were seen but conditions were anything but pleasant on this day. The fine misty rain of the morning developed into heavier showers, making the tussock very wet and the bush unpleasant to scramble through. Late in the afternoon, and all rather wet, we stood on an open place on the ridge which separated our takahe valley from the next to the south. From here we could look back at our lake nestling in the tussock-clad valley, and far down below on the other side were several clearings which looked promising. It was late afternoon, the weather was wet and so were we, and the drop down looked very steep.

## A Fresh Locality

But to have come so far, see likely-looking country for takahe and not examine it, was unthinkable. Three of us, led by Dr. Orbell, decided to go down on a rush trip. The packs were left on



MEMBERS of the expedition photographed among the tussocks of the Takahe Valley. From left: Joan Telfer, Rex Watson, Ron Weston, Dr. D. Jennings, Dr. R. A. Falla, Neil McCrostie, Dr. G. B. Orbell.