

the ridge and down we went. It was steep, but we were spurred on by signs that takahe also used this route, and we emerged finally on the largest of the clearings and commenced our search. There were numerous signs and soon nest sites, both old and new, were found, and at least four birds observed at close range. Satisfied that the takahe used this valley as well, we made up the hill again with only brief pauses to "steady our cardiac respiration," as our medical leader put it. We arrived back at the camp just on dark, very wet and tired, and satisfied that our job had been well done.

### Lost Day

The morning broke fine again and was voted a light day for all hands. The main job was finished; there remained only the odds and ends for us to do. It was unfortunate that evidence had been obtained of the presence of stoats in this country, and one of these animals was sighted near the camp on this morning. One of our members was busy preparing sets for traps to catch stoats; another was taking a vigil with field-glasses to observe feeding habits of the birds; there were numerous photographs wanted of the locality and its features; more insects to be collected and further flowering plants of the valley to be gathered. Everybody worked cheerfully and such helpful co-operation existed between all members that my self-appointed task of entomologist-cum-botanist was a very pleasant one. Many new finds were made among the smaller fauna, and at least four new species of spiders have already been identified. What if a yell of "Spider here" greeted me as I tried to put a protesting weta in a glass tube; or a muscular youth handed me a posy of wild flowers with, "I brought this for you, Sir" in the approved Mts. Mopp manner? It all spoke of the comradeship that existed.

### Conclusions

And what of our main findings? We satisfied ourselves that the takahe lived in the valley in good numbers; that it required a certain type of country and, unless adverse conditions occurred, was unlikely to be found elsewhere; that it existed in a neighbouring valley; that if unmolested it would continue to survive in this isolated mountain fastness. We were fortunate to see both egg and young chick. At close range we observed its peculiar feeding habits on a diet almost wholly confined to the soft bases of snow tussock. But above all was the evidence that, far from being nearly extinct, the takahe, or notornis, was still a very live member

of New Zealand's strange birds. Incidentally, my extra burden of wheat and maize, about which I had grumbled many times on the trip in, was ignored by the birds. They led a primitive and rather Spartan sort of life and such civilised rations were unknown to them. The wheat and maize gave us only negative evidence.

The greatest danger to the birds is not, in my opinion, the presence of stoats or other vermin, but man. A carelessly thrown match or cigarette stub would result in the devastation of the bird's food supply and result in a serious reduction in the ranks of a species just holding their own. I discount the possibility of poaching: the penalty would be too severe and public opinion against any attempt to take the birds. And surely the New Zealand public are now wise enough to profit by past errors and leave this remnant of our peculiar bird life intact.



AT TOP: The Egg, "a pinkish stone colour with light and dark brown blotches." BELOW: The second valley which was explored, showing one of the clearings where more notornis were discovered.