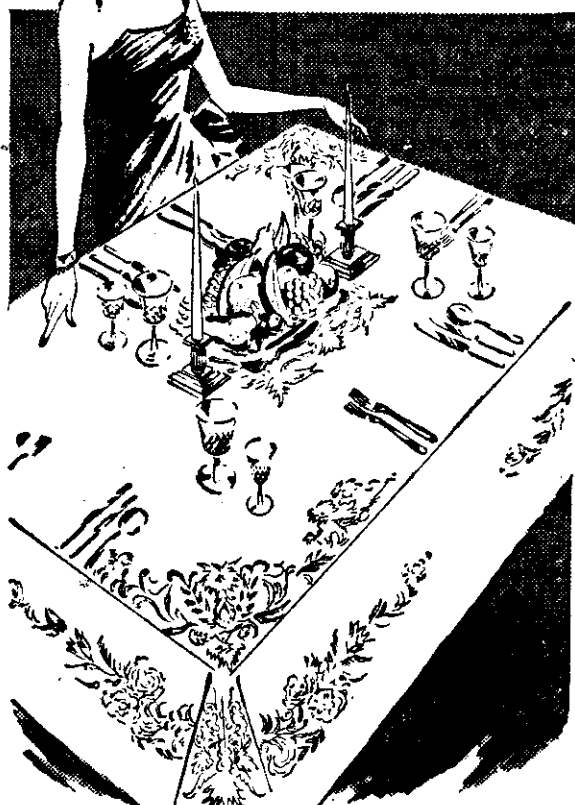


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GANNET IN FLIGHT

Some cross the Tasman in days . . . but many die on the way

SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR

One-way Travellers

by "SUNDOWNER"

SOMEONE—I have neither his name nor his address—has sent me another message about rabbits in Ecuador. The first time I was told anonymously that their condition was worrying the Ecuadorian Government I suspected a hoax, and I suspect it more strongly now when the news comes anonymously a second time; but it

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could be true. Ecuador is one of the countries that have had technical assistance from the United Nations, and if there is no Minister in Quito capable of arguing that rabbits are good to eat and therefore to be encouraged, there are many experts in the service of the United Nations capable of starting the argument for him. I am, in fact, assured that while we have given Boards in New Zealand drastic powers to kill rabbits at our expense, Ecuador has established a Rabbit Production Centre and has asked the United Nations for assistance in encouraging rabbits to breed. It is a circumstantial story which it would be reckless to circulate without some facts. I find it almost as difficult to suppose that it is all fiction as to believe that there is a Government in the Southern Hemisphere—Ecuador, I suppose, is in neither hemisphere—open to the argument that rabbits pay.

* * *

WHEN I repeated a few weeks ago what an Australian ornithologist said about our dotterels, that they are the only east-to-west migrators to Australia, R.R.D.M. wrote from Mangonui to warn me that "the

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bird men would be after me." But the bird men lay low. Nothing at all happened until R.R.D.M. himself returned with a long statement made two years ago in a newspaper in Auckland. With this

in front of me I am almost bold enough to say (in the manner of a Chinese philosopher) that R.R.D.M. is right and that the Australian expert is not wrong. The point made by the Australian was that dotterels alone, as far as he knew, migrated regularly from New Zealand in the autumn and returned regularly in the spring. The fact established by R.R.D.M. is that gannets go in large numbers to Australia every autumn. They go, but they do not return. If they come back eventually it is one or two or three years later; and large numbers of the birds hatched here each year do not leave New Zealand.

That, if I have read the statement intelligently, is all the authorities have established so far. They have ringed hundreds of gannets on this side of the Tasman and had a few rings returned from the other side. They know that some birds get across in days, others only in weeks, and that many die on the way. But they have not, I gather, found a New Zealand bird in Australia in the autumn and the same bird back in New Zealand in the following spring.

If, then, migration in birds means going away from a country or district and returning after a few months, it is still possible that dotterels are the only birds in New Zealand which travel east and west. If migration means going away from the country of origin and returning (presumably) some time, gannets do it as well as dotterels and perhaps in larger numbers. But gannets are sea birds. They have webbed feet, and they live on fish. Dotterels are land birds and live on grubs, worms, insects and crustacea. Though they find most of their food where water has just been, they are as terrestrial as we are, and can make the journey to Australia only in long flights of hundreds of miles at a stretch. They are therefore far ahead

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 12, 1957.