

# A New Zealand Ornithological Romance

## Interesting Story from 3YA

ONE of the most interesting stories given from 3YA for a long time was that by Mr. A. F. O'Donoghue, N.Z. Inst. R.A.O.U., upon the rare Takahe, or Notornis Hochstetteri.

**O**F all the quaint and wonderful birds inhabiting the highland forests and marshy lowlands of this unique country, the takahe stands out as one of the most mysterious and romantic. Needless to say it is one of the rarest of New Zealand's rare birds; and apparently it has always been a rare bird with a limited habitat.

The takahe, scientifically known as Notornis Hochstetteri, is about the size of a turkey; it has very strong legs, heavy wide-spreading toes, a heavy wedge-shaped bill and a thick powerful neck. It is decked in a wonderful plumage of indigo blue shaded here and there with darker blue to black and dark greenish tinges, and the legs and bill are coloured dark vermillion. The wings are from nine to twelve inches in length, but the bird is flightless; as a compensation for the loss of its flying powers, however, it has developed a wonderful speed on foot, this fact being only once demonstrated, and that was when the first bird captured was observed with a dog in hot pursuit.

The colour of the plumage, the shape of the bill, the white under-tail coverts

that his great reputation as an ornithological biologist was further enhanced; and that piece of work ranks among the greatest biological research feats even to the present day. Sir Richard completed his task with only

telli. And notwithstanding the fact that every muscle, every sinew, and every bone of the takahe's body has since been subjected to the closest examination in the biologists' laboratory the work accomplished by Sir Richard

Mantelli by Sir Richard Owen, after Mantell, the discoverer of the fossil bones, the South Island species has since been named Notornis Hochstetteri. No living specimen of Notornis Mantelli, the North Island species, has ever been recorded.

Two years after the discovery of the fossil remains in the North Island by Mr. Mantell a party of foreign sealers who were operating in the West Coast Sounds, located and secured the first living specimen of the takahe. This was in the year 1849. The first indication to this foreign sealing party that a large bird was present in their vicinity, was the discovery of its great footprints in the recently fallen snow. Anxious to obtain a glimpse of the stranger a stalking party with dogs set off on the trail. After a short trek they sighted the great bird out on the open snow. Immediately the dogs broke and gave chase, the bird set them a task, but after a long chase the dogs closed with it and the precious takahe was their prisoner. It was taken alive and kept on the sealing schooner for some days. Eventually the cook decided on the blending of a delicacy with the rather rough fare of the ship, and the takahe was ac-



MISS MARIE GAUDIN

A member of the Auckland Comedy Players. These talented entertainers are very popular with listeners to 1YA.

—S. P. Andrew, photo.



THE BOHEMIAN DUO.

Mr. and Mrs. W. Clinch, one of the most popular "turns" at 1YA. They are talented vocalists and instrumentalists who combine music and humour in a delightful manner. They have toured the principal theatres throughout Australia and New Zealand under the direction of J. C. Williamson's Celebrity Vaudeville. Listeners-in to 1YA greatly enjoy their quaint renditions of Maori and Hawaiian songs and popular hits. The lady member of the Duo is well known as "Nell, the Bohemian." She possesses a very pleasing radio voice that has endeared her to all listeners-in.

—S. P. Andrew, photo.



MRS. ELVIRA MEBAN

Is a mezzo-soprano with a large repertoire of songs. Prior to her departure for Christchurch Mrs. Meban was a regular performer at 2YA.

—S. P. Andrew, photo.

as well as other characteristics of the takahe immediately suggest, even to the most casual observer, that there is an alliance between this bird and the pukeko, and further that the bird belongs to that great family of rails which has a world-wide distribution.

The first indication that such a bird existed in New Zealand was brought to light in the unearthing of a few fossil bones in the North Island away back in the 1840's. These were sent home to Sir Richard Owen, a world-famed biologist, who, after a prolonged and careful examination, and comparison with the skeletons of many species, drew a description of the original so true to life, as was evidenced when the first live bird was taken two years later,

one or two bones on which to work, chief among these being the skull. With the very, very scanty material at his disposal he succeeded in placing the bird in its order, located its family, established the genus and created the species, naming it Notornis Man-

Owen, with a fossil skull as his foundation, stands unshaken.

It has been discovered, however, that the South Island bird is a different species from that which obtained in the North Island, and while the North Island species was named Notornis

cordingly slaughtered. The skin of the bird was preserved, but those priceless bones that were worth their weight in radium to the ornithological world were cast overboard as though they were nothing more than the bones of a domestic fowl. Mr. Mantell, the discoverer of the fossil bones, secured this skin and forwarded it to the British Museum.

This is the only instance on record of the takahe having been seen out in the open, and the only record to the present day of the swiftness of the bird on foot when pursued by an enemy.

We next hear of this rare and lonely bird a few years later when a single specimen was captured by a Maori