

# BIRDS

ISSUED BY

**New Zealand Native Bird Protection Society (Inc.)**

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WAITING FOR BREAKFAST AT A BIRD-LOVER'S GATE.

*[Photo by J. N. Easdale.]*

**OBJECTS.**—To advocate and obtain the efficient protection and preservation of our native birds, a bird day for our schools, unity of control of all wild life, and the preservation of sanctuaries, scenic reserves, etc., in their native state.

Affiliated with the International Committee for the Protection of Wild Birds.

The foundation of true conservation is in the setting aside of sanctuaries efficiently and rigidly controlled by men who know how.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS:**

Life Members - £5.

Endowment Members, £1 per annum. Ordinary Members, 5/- per annum  
Children - 1/- per annum.

(Membership open to all.)

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***New Zealanders! Protect Your Native Birds!***

## "SHALL WE DO IT?"

(By CAPT. E. V. SANDERSON.)

Mr. A. H. Gibson, J.P., writes a very interesting description of the early days in Akatarawa Valley (about 25 miles from Wellington) as it existed in 1884.

"I was the only settler living in the valley at that time. True, there were one or two whares, but they were uninhabited. It was a lonely valley right in the heart of the bush, but beautiful as only New Zealand's unspoiled beauty is. Mine was a two-roomed whare on Section 389, which had about 50 acres cleared and in grass. I slept in a hammock slung to the wall-plates. Have you ever slept alone in the bush miles from anyone? If not, then you don't know how our far-off ancestors lived long before towns were invented. The sighing of the breeze among the pine-tops, the distant murmur of the river, the call of the weka or the morepork, and then when the winter gales blow, afar off the crash of some mighty monarch of the forest as he falls to the earth from which he sprang hundreds of years ago. And then the coming of the dawn; a note from a distant tui on some branch in the forest quickly answered by another close by; a kaka's shrill cry from the big rata on the opposite hill; then a whole chorus in which tuis, kakas and bell-birds join, mingled with the first morning breath of the breeze from up the river. And now a shaft of sunshine strikes over the hill to the east and lights on the tasselled tops of the rimu, where already pigeons are wheeling, their white and bronze breasts gleaming against the blue sky. In the elbow of the river, just where the water glides under an overhanging tree-fern, a blue mountain duck with her brood of young is paddling up stream. And now the huias call from over the river where the rangiora is in full bloom, and the old hinau rears its worm-eaten boughs on high. Some parraquets are chattering in the honeysuckle, whose red blossoms hold that nectar they so love, and on the very top of the dead pine in the clearing perches a bush-hawk. The kakas in a body of some 20 or 30, screaming loudly, wheel round the crimson rata, in whose wide-spreading boughs they sleep every night, preparatory to flying far over the bush-ranges to other feeding-grounds. A warm scented breath from the heart of the bush steals on the ambient air. Day has begun on the Akatarawa Valley. . . .

Often I would go eeling up the river with a bob made of interlaced worms dug from the garden. It is dark and muddy on the river bed. Great trees loom up on either bank, dark and mysterious. All sorts of noises come from the

depths of the bush. Think of the ages and ages these hills have been here with their forests, hiding strange sights and sounds long ere man ever entered this lovely land! All round in the river you hear the 'chug, chug' of the eels snapping at the mosquitoes now everywhere in evidence. And now a dim light constantly growing steals round you, and over against the ratas on the distant skyline the rising moon is outlined like a silver globe, and round the dead trees in the clearing is heard the chattering of the bats as they dart to and fro in pursuit of insects. Close by a weka sounds his eerie, mournful note, while a morepork, perched on an overhanging bough, screams shrilling. A puff of the light breeze comes laden with an earthy smell from the bush depths where rotting logs lie, the remains of trees that fell perhaps many, many years ago, and are now only a shell covered with creepers and mosses. How it brings to me dim, ancestral memories that no residence in crowded foetid cities can ever wholly stifle."

Again, Mr. Gibson writes of the early days around Mt. Egmont:—

"In those days the chorus of birds in the early mornings in the bush surrounding the clearings was most beautiful. Tuis were everywhere. There were also large numbers of pheasants, and on the occasions of earthquakes you could hear the alarmed cries of the cock birds before the 'quake. Later, I lived near Nelson, and on one occasion rode with a friend through the Rai Valley to a relative of his at Whangamoā. In the valley the kakas were so numerous and made so much noise that speech was impossible. They were everywhere, also parraquets, bell-birds, tuis, pigeons, fantails, tomtits, and the friendly little bush robins. In the lagoon at Whangamoā, the ducks and black swans seemed countless. There were Paradise ducks in abundance. I was the first settler in the Akatarawa Valley, off Upper Hutt. A whole spring and summer (in 1884) I was there alone. It was most beautiful. There was a large rata on a hill close by, and the kakas roosted there every night, leaving soon after dawn for their feeding grounds elsewhere. The song of the birds in the early morning was delightful. Huias were plentiful; they always went about in pairs, and you could hear their calls in every direction. In the tops of the lofty rimus pigeons were nesting, and often you would see them flying around, their breasts flashing in the sunlight. Parraquets, tuis, robins, wekas (or woodhens) and many others whose names were unknown to me were in multitudes (no exaggeration). In one tawa alone I counted thirty pigeons one day busily engaged eating the black damson-like berries. In the creek were often ducks, sometimes several of the blue mountain duck variety, which were very

tame, quite different from the other species. The note of the large variegated cuckoos could be heard frequently, and at times bush-hawks would perch on the topmost branch of a dead rimu in the clearing. Woodhens were very numerous, but I never heard (as I used to on my brother's farm in Okoke, Taranaki) the kiwis' note. Great flocks of parraquets were feasting on the fuchsia berries. With the lovely tree-ferns bending over the river, the rangiora and wineberry in bloom, here and there the crimson blossom of the rata, or of the honeysuckle, the waving branches of the rimus or kahikatea, with the birds everywhere singing at the top of their voices, it made a scene I shall never forget.

"As to your Society, however, I fear you are too late on the scene. The introduction of ferrets, stoats, weasels, and other vermin, which, leaving the rabbits untouched and made straight-way for the birds, was the end of them. Afterwards, as this was not enough, the little German owl was brought out. Then deer, thar, chamois, elk, goats, and other such pests, ruinous and destructive to our native bush, were introduced. I have seen acres of bush ruined for all time by these pests, the bark stripped, the branches of many broken down with their teeth, the seed-beds beneath trodden hard and ruined by their feet. You will never now rid the bush of these destructive pests. The bush in New Zealand is doomed, together with the native birds. The mountains will eventually become heaps of debris, slipping into the river beds and covering the lower lands with stones and soil. It will for ever be a lasting monument to the insensate folly of man, who, without thought or reason, has brought a lovely and beautiful forest-covered land, replete with unique and exquisite bird life, to ruin. I repeat, sir, and with deep regret I say it—you are now *too late* to save either the birds or the forest they live by and which also depends on them."

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Now should we just give in and say we cannot, or should we act in that spirit which made Britain great? Once the public can be brought to realize the economic importance of bird and bush, conservation is easy; but the public must be on the side of the forests and birds, and it is in their interests to be so. Our forest-inhabiting birds were evolved for those conditions prevailing at the period Mr. Gibson writes. Return our remaining forests to their natural condition and the birds will be there. Plant-eating animals and fire are now the greatest menace to the homes and food supplies of our forest-inhabiting birds. Good progress has been made since the inauguration of the Native Bird Society. Let us carry on, and with the help of all the better thinking, the impossible shall be done. Mr. Gibson has offered to lend his help too.

The case is by no means hopeless, because when fire and animals are removed from our forests the regeneration in a few years is almost unbelievable, and the birds promptly increase amazingly with the enhanced food-supply and more favourable conditions, as the writer has seen on a limited area.

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### ARE WE PROGRESSING?

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Present-day carelessness in regard to forest fires would receive a decided check if the penalties therefor enforced in the days of Frederick the Great were re-enacted. In a proclamation on December 3, 1775, the Emperor decreed that "Anyone starting a fire in or within 100 paces of a forest, or using a pitch torch or any fire when fishing in any lakes within and on streams or creeks flowing through a forest, or who smokes tobacco during the dry or summer season within a forest, even though no damage be done, shall be punished with a 4-week gaol sentence, and, if any damage results, shall pay such damage. Any person wilfully or maliciously starting a fire in a forest, with intent to damage said forest, shall be punished with a 10-year penitentiary sentence at hard labour, and upon establishing the moral responsibility the sentence may be increased even to the death penalty."

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### AMBULANCE WORK.

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Out in the midst of traffic fluttered the wounded sparrow, its broken wing dragging. Cars whizzed by, each wheel a threat charged with death. Few of the motorists saw the bird, but finally one woman driver noticed the pathetic little creature and swung her machine to the curb to rescue it. Just as she was about to pick it up, however, recounts a news story in the "New Orleans States," two other sparrows alighted one on each side of the injured bird and, catching its wings with their bills, dragged it to the sidewalk. Then, with the skill of human workmen lifting a heavy piece of furniture, the two rescuers hauled it over the curb and into a clump of bushes.

A somewhat similar happening to this occurred at Paekakariki, near Wellington, where a silver-eye was seen to lead its mate, which had a hurt wing, up into a ngaio tree by hops and jumps right up to a feeding tray placed in the tree. While the wounded bird fed, its mate drove off all other silver-eyes.

Similarly, snipe have been reported to be well up in splint methods and are credited with being adepts at mending legs which have been broken by shot, with odd bits of grass, etc.