

Spotted Crake in a Grass Crop.—I was mowing a field of Sudan grass the other day, and the machine cut the head off a bird, and on examining it, it proved to be *Porzana fluminea* (Spotted Crake). I was surprised to find this bird so far from a swamp: the nearest swamp is some miles away. Has this bird been found in a similar situation before? I also found some time back a nest of the *Coturnix pectoralis* (Stubble Quail) containing 16 eggs. As these eggs are large considering the size of the bird, it is always a puzzle to me how the bird covers them.—N. GEARY, R.A.O.U., Mount Pleasant, Dalby, Queensland. 27/2/1922.

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Australian Magpie and Sparrow.—While the bandsmen were practising in the mill one day in February, 1922, they were eye-witnesses to bird cannibalism. A White-backed Magpie swooped down on a Sparrow, killing it by picking its head, and then going behind a post tore open the Sparrow's breast and commenced to eat the flesh. When disturbed, the Magpie carried its repast to a safer distance. No doubt, owing to the dry weather and the scarcity of grubs and insects, Magpies, for the sake of sustenance, take on Sparrows or any other small birds they can get their claws on.—J. M. SEXTON, State School, Henty, Vic.

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Nankeen Night Herons and Young Ducks.—It is an interesting fact that as far as I can remember, for fully forty years past, and probably a great deal longer, Nankeen Night Herons (*Nycticorax caledonicus*) have been roosting during the day in the Melbourne Zoological Gardens. It is quite likely they were nesting here in days gone by, but now only roosting. As soon as it gets dusk, the birds fly off in companies, sometimes two or half a dozen, as the case might be, apparently to the mouth of the Yarra, and there they evidently feed. The number varies according to the time of the year; just now there are about eighteen, that being the number that passed over in various-sized companies last evening. When the nesting season is on, there are only seven or eight birds, these being the young of the last season, and therefore, not old enough to nest. Another interesting point is that they are very keen on feeding on any young Ducks they can get hold of. One of our Ducks brought out five young ones last October; we did not know they were there, but the Nankeen Herons found out very quickly and ate the lot before we could stop them. Therefore they probably also take the young of many different kinds of waterfowl. Another fact of interest is that the Egyptian Nankeen Night Herons roost in just the same way during the daytime in the Zoological Gardens at Cairo. Their habits there are practically the same as ours here. I remember seeing them on several occasions. They also have a habit, in common with ours, of hunting round open en-

closures where the birds are fed on meat in case any scraps remain.—W. H. D. LE SOUEF, Zoological Gardens, Melbourne.

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Fossil Birds in New Zealand.—An item in a Masterton paper of April 14th, 1920, taken from the Wellington *Evening Post*, is of interest to those ornithologists who study the former distribution and extinction of New Zealand birds.

"On occasions even scientists have heavy manual tasks to perform, says the 'Post.' Recently Dr. A. Thomson (Director of the Dominion Museum) and two members of his staff, Messrs. H. Hamilton and Phillips, excavated and hauled by hand from a deep fissure in some limestone rock in the Wairarapa district about seven tons of Moa bones and other valuable relics.

"About four years ago, while deer-stalking over Mr. Murdoch McLeod's Haurangi estate, near Martinborough, 62 miles north from Wellington, Mr. Walter Harrison, of Masterton, came across this fissure in a limestone ridge, in which he discovered a number of bones. He reported the discovery to the Museum authorities, and an investigation was undertaken by Dr. Thomson. The find, indeed, has proved a most interesting one.

"From the fissure were taken the remains of about twenty-five Moas and of fifteen Aptorries. The latter were extinct birds resembling the Weka, but very much larger—standing about three feet high, with sturdy limbs, and necks. Remains of the Notornis were also found. The Notornis is a bird about which there was much discussion recently owing to the discovery of a live specimen in Otago, and of which three are known to have been seen alive. About twenty of them had left their bones in this opening in the rocks. Piled up were also the remains of numbers of Kakapo (a Parrot), the Kiwi, extinct Ducks, and, strangely enough, bones of the tuatara lizard, which is now only found on Stephens Island, and one or two other islands round the coast. There were remains of the New Zealand Crow, the Huia, and the large Laughing Owl—a very rare bird.

"Round about were other similar openings in the rocks, but only in this one were these relics of a past age found. The scientists find it difficult to account for this fact, and for so many being accumulated there. Recently a similar discovery was made in a cave near Pahi-atua. One theory is that the fissure formed a bird mausoleum, to which in a past age the birds went to die. There were no evidences of human bones, and the scientists estimate that the bones have been there for at least five centuries, and thus date back to before the coming of the Maori.

The remains have been brought to Wellington, and are at present being cleaned, sorted, and classified.

Dr. Thomson believes there may be collections in other caves between Pallister Bay and Napier, and particularly asks that any discoveries should be reported."

Of the above mentioned birds, the Notornis has long been extinct in the North Island, and is now believed to inhabit only the country around the rugged West Coast Sounds of the South Island. The Kakapo is extremely rare in the North Island, but is found in moderate numbers in parts of the South, while the Laughing Owl is very rare and confined to the latter island.



Le Souef, William Henry Dudley. 1922. "Nankeen Night Herons and Young Ducks." *The Emu : official organ of the Australasian Ornithologists' Union* 21(4), 312–313. <https://doi.org/10.1071/mu921311d>.

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