

addition to all these causes there is the fact that the settlers' sons, who were children when the pheasant was first plentiful, are now grown up, and where one gun was carried, now two or more are added; but I think the weka the principal cause. For, at the Maori clearing on the Wanganui River pheasants are plentiful, as also on the Waitotara River; and they are also to be found, though not so numerous as at Maori settlements, in the newer bush-country opened up during the last four or five years in the Wangaehu Valley. But it may be noticed that as Maori dogs disappear and furze hedges increase the pheasant decreases, and it is very hard to suggest a remedy. The Acclimatization Society for years spent a considerable sum in buying wekas' heads, and thousands were paid for each year, but no perceptible decrease has been noticed, and at last the society have discontinued the practice.

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ART. XXIV.—*The Takahe (Notornis mantelli) in Western Otago.*

By JAMES PARK, F.G.S. (Geological Survey Department).

[Read before the Wellington Philosophical Society, 17th October, 1888.]

UP to the present time only three specimens of this remarkable bird have been secured, and, as the opinion has been expressed by some naturalists that it is now quite extinct, I have prepared the following notes, collected during the progress of various explorations in Otago, as tending to show that it not only exists, but is probably as numerous now as when the colony was first settled by Europeans.

I may mention at the outset that the genus *Notornis* was founded by Professor Owen in the year 1848, upon portions of a skull and other parts of the skeleton of a large rail discovered at Waingongoro by the Hon. Walter Mantell, while exploring at that place for moa-bones. These fossils are all that now remain to testify the existence of the *Notornis* in the North Island, where it was known to the natives as the moho.

By a strange and, at the same time, most fitting coincidence, the first two specimens of the *Notornis*, or *takahe* as it was called in the South Island, were secured by Mr. Mantell in 1849. The first of these was captured by a party of sealers at Duck Cove, Resolution Island, in Dusky Sound; and the second by the Maoris on Secretary Island, opposite to Deas Cove, in Thompson Sound. Both of these were forwarded to England, and are now in the British Museum in London.

After a lapse of over thirty years the third specimen was

captured by a party of rabbiters about the beginning of 1880, on the Maruroa Flat, on the east side of Lake Te Anau. This bird was also sent to England, and at the present time probably adorns the shelf of some foreign museum. Since the above date no fresh example of the *Notornis* has been secured, although much time has been spent in the search around Lake Te Anau.

My first acquaintance with this bird dates back to 1881. During the months of January and February of that year I was engaged, with Mr. A. McKay and Mr. John Buchanan, on a geological and botanical exploration of the Wanaka country. On the 20th of January we struck our camp at the forks of the Matukituki, opposite Mount Aspiring, and proceeded up the south branch of that river to Cascade Creek, a distance of eight or ten miles. Here we pitched our tents, at an altitude of 2,000ft. above the sea, in the shelter of the *Fagus* bush which covers all the slopes of the surrounding mountains and the greater portion of the river-flats.

Shortly after dusk our attention was attracted by the call of a strange bird which approached within a few chains of our camp, uttering at short intervals a loud booming note. Now, we were all pretty familiar with the calls of the different birds usually met with in the high lands of Otago, but the call of this bird was quite unlike any of them. We knew also the booming note of the bittern, which, although like this in kind, was left far behind both in volume and intensity. Besides, this was a high, mountainous, bush-covered country, ill adapted for this bird, which usually frequents raupo-swamps and creek-banks. After some deliberation we arrived at the conclusion that this was the *Notornis*, a determination subsequently borne out by facts which came under my own observation.

The next evening, with Mr. McKay's assistance, I lit a large bright fire in the bush, about four chains from the camp, knowing from experience that birds of nocturnal habits were often attracted by the light of a camp-fire. Retiring a short distance from the fire, we awaited the result. As we anticipated, in less than half an hour our friend of the previous evening approached, uttering his booming note as he walked about. We now crawled towards the fire, making as little noise as possible in passing over the dry twigs and leaves lying upon the ground. When we drew near, the bird retreated from the opposite side of the fire, and when we withdrew it again approached. This manœuvre was repeated several times without any success on our part; but at the same time it should be mentioned that the bird, by its movements, exhibited no signs of haste or alarm.

On several occasions we were probably within four yards

of it, and at these times when it uttered its note we could distinctly feel the ground vibrate beneath us. We, however, failed to catch a glimpse of it, as in the intense darkness of the forest this was quite impossible, excepting it chanced to get between us and the fire, which it carefully avoided doing.

The next day I examined the scene of the previous night's adventures, and found that the clear space below the matted branches of the scrub under which the bird had eluded us was about 20in. high, thus affording a means of approximately determining its height.

The *Notornis* remained in the vicinity of the camp during our stay at this place, being evidently more curious than alarmed at our presence. He generally sallied forth at dusk and retired at daybreak, his deep note completely dwarfing the cries of the kiwi and noisy kakapo.

On the 29th January we struck our tents and returned to our old camping-ground near the forks of the Matukituki. Shortly after dusk of this evening we heard the note of a *Notornis*, and, proceeding up the south branch to the upper end of the gorge, I disturbed the bird under a sandbank close to the river. On examining this spot I found that it had scraped a shallow hole in the dry sand, after the same manner, and probably for the same purpose, as the common barn-door fowl.

The river-flats at this place, situated about 1,700ft. above the sea, are covered with a scanty mixed bush, affording but little cover; the ground, however, is thickly strewn with large masses of rock which have fallen from the steep cliffs on the south side of the river, and below which the *Notornis* no doubt found shelter during the day-time.

The next evening I again proceeded to the upper end of the gorge, where the *Notornis* announced his arrival by his loud note. Knowing where to look for it, I approached the bank as cautiously as possible, but, just as I looked over, it scampered away as fast as it could run.

On this occasion I was fortunate enough to catch a passing view of it, although in the uncertain starlight I could only make out its general outline. It must be remembered that it was only in sight a few seconds; but the impression it left upon my mind at the time was that its colour was very dark, and its height about that of a full-grown turkey. An important fact to be noted here is that, although I got within a few feet of it, the bird made no attempt to fly, but ran away very swiftly, and without making any sound or cry of alarm. There can be little doubt that with a sharp dog I could easily have caught it; but, unfortunately, we had no dog attached to our camp at this time.

Seven years now elapsed before the *Notornis* again came

under my observation. At the beginning of this year I visited Dusky Sound for the purpose of examining the mineral deposits discovered there by Mr. William Docherty, the well-known prospector. On the day after my arrival—the 5th January—I accompanied Docherty to his pyrrhotine lode on the lower slopes of Mount Hodge, situated about a mile from the beach. Shortly after commencing the steep ascent we heard the deep booming call of a bird, which I at once recognised as similar to that of the strange bird I had heard in the Matukituki Valley in 1881. After listening for awhile I expressed my belief that this was the *Notornis*. Docherty, however, stoutly denied this, stating that he had often heard the same sound, which was what he called in his own words “a volcanic noise in the bowels of the earth.” Without stopping to argue the point, I pressed along, hoping to see the bird, which appeared to be somewhere on our path. The ascent at this point was very steep, our track being along the right bank of a precipitous rocky stream. In a few minutes we got so close to the bird that there could be no doubt whatever as to the organic origin, so to speak, of the sound, which seemed to proceed from the crop of the bird. I now told Docherty to keep quiet for a little, and he would soon see the cause of the booming, at which he became very excited, and shouted loudly that nothing would convince him it was not “a volcanic noise.” I need hardly state that we heard nothing more of this bird that day.

On returning to the hut in the evening my field-hand informed me that when he was fishing off the point close by he had heard a takahe in the bush in the direction in which I had been during the day. On asking him what he knew of that bird he said he was one of the party of rabbiters who caught the takahe near Lake Te Anau in 1880; and, as he had often heard the call of that bird and its mate, which, by the way, was never captured, he was quite sure the booming note which he had heard during the day was that of a takahe. In view of the determination I had previously arrived at, I considered this evidence conclusive that this was indeed the *Notornis*. I may mention that this was the first occasion on which I heard the *Notornis* spoken of as the takahe, the only name by which it was known to my field-hand.

That same evening, and every successive evening afterwards during my stay at Dusky Sound, I heard two takahas in the bush at no great distance from the hut. In the course of my various excursions in this sound I heard the takahe at the following places, not including those already mentioned: In the left-hand branch of Docherty's Creek, not far from the open country; at the north end of Cooper's Island; in a gully on the southern slopes of Mount Pender, apparently not far

from the beach; and on the south side of the sound, about opposite the upper end of Cooper's Island.

It will be remembered that the first specimen of *Notornis*, secured by Mr. Mantell, was captured at Duck Cove, Resolution Island, a distance of some seven miles from Cooper's Island; and the second at Secretary Island, in Thompson Sound, about thirty miles further up the coast. After a lapse of over thirty years a third specimen was captured in 1880, near Lake Te Anau; and the following year it was heard in the Upper Matukituki Valley, behind Mount Aspiring, by myself and others of an exploring party; and now, again, in the beginning of the present year, at Dusky Sound, by myself and others. When passing through Wellington some four months ago Docherty informed the Hon. Mr. Mantell that he had recently seen a *Notornis* at Dusky Sound. He said he came upon it in the bush close to the beach, and that it flew some distance on to the water, and then made back to the shore.

I think I have said enough to show that the *Notornis* still exists in the lonely sounds and mountain-recesses of Western Otago, in places far removed from the ordinary haunts of men. That it is gradually becoming extinct is no doubt quite true, but, whatever the cause, it can hardly be said to be on account of the inroads of man. Its extinction is, possibly, partly due to scarcity of food, and partly to a process of natural decay which is no doubt in a measure induced by the effects of the first.

So reclusive and retiring in its habits, it is probable that few if any further additions will be made to the three specimens of this bird already secured, unless special efforts be made in this direction; and, though this may entail a considerable expenditure of time and energy, the object is one deserving the support of every true naturalist.

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ART. XXV.—Notes on some New Zealand Birds.

By T. W. KIRK, F.R.M.S.

[Read before the Wellington Philosophical Society, 13th February, 1889.]

1. RHIPIDURA FULIGINOSA (Black Fantail, Tiwakawaka).

This bird is generally believed to be confined to the South Island. There are, however, several well-authenticated records of its capture in the North. A specimen was quite recently shot at Levin, a new township on the Wellington and Manawatu Railway Company's land, and presented to the Colonial Museum by Mr. Charles Gillespie.