

## ART. XLII.—Notes on some South Island Birds, and Maori Associations connected therewith.

By J. COWAN.

[Read before the Wellington Philosophical Society, 18th November, 1905.]

WHILE in the extreme south of the South Island this year, engaged in collecting historical Maori matter from the very few well-informed Natives who have survived to these days, I gathered one or two notes regarding certain southern birds which may be of some interest, seeing that the particulars have not hitherto been placed on record. My chief informants were members of the Ngaitahu Tribe living at Colac Bay (or Oraka), on the shores of Foveaux Strait—elderly men who have been sealers and bird-hunters for the greater part of their lives, and who are more reliable on matters of natural history and bush-craft than the other southern Natives. They are also in part descended from the ancient Ngatimamoe, who ceased to exist as a tribe probably over a century ago.

My first note refers to the *Notornis mantelli*, the *rara avis* called by the Maoris the "*takahea*." The name of this bird is spelled "*takahe*" in Buller's "Birds," and all other works in which it is mentioned. The Maoris inform me that this is wrong; there should be a final *a*, as I have spelt it here. The *takahea* is undoubtedly the most interesting of all our native birds; it has almost, if not quite, vanished from existence. The last-known living specimen was captured in 1898 on the shores of the Middle Fiord of Lake Te Anau. It is possible that a few specimens of this most ancient of feathered creatures may still roam the great forests of Fiordland, between Te Anau and the west coast. It is not necessary here to describe the bird further than to say that it is not unlike a *pukeko* or swamp-hen in general appearance and plumage, that it has short wings useless for purposes of flight, but armed below the carpal joint with a sharp spur or claw, and that it has a very strong and peculiarly arched red bill.

In former times, according to Te Paina and Kupa Haereroa, of Colac Bay, *takahea* were plentiful around the shores of Lakes Te Anau and Manapouri, and the Southland Maoris were accustomed to make annual expeditions for their capture. At this period the shores of these great lakes were inhabited by the Maoris, and villages stood at a spot called Owhtiangate-ra (the Place of the Rising Sun), at the foot of Te Anau, at the points where the Waiau River enters and leaves Manapouri, and else-

where in the vicinity. Some of the numerous wooded islands in Manapouri were also favourite camping-places of the Maoris, who snared birds in the woods, caught wild ducks in the lagoons, and fished for eels by torchlight in the sandy bays, spearing them with the wooden triple-pronged *matarau*.

In winter the *takahea* were driven down from the mountains by the snows, and they were then found around the shores of the lakes, feeding chiefly on the sweet swamp-grass *pouaka*. One of the spots much frequented by the bird, according to the Murihiku Maoris, was a lagoon (or *hapua*) known as Te Wai-o-Pani, on the south-west shore of Te Anau. This lagoon is backed by a high cliff, on the top of which is a plateau with a *pakihi* or natural clearing, rich in fern-root, one of the food-staples of the olden Maori. This clearing, a perfect and safe retreat for a broken tribe, is said to have been one of the Ngatimamoe places of refuge when that unfortunate tribe was almost exterminated by Ngatahu, and the remnant driven into the vast forest wilderness of Fiordland, called by the Maoris Te Rua-o-te-Moko, where they finally became extinct. The *pakihi* was accessible only by a very precipitous route up the face of the cliff. The white man, say the old people of Murihiku, has not yet discovered this well-hidden spot. Here the *takahea* was sometimes found. It was hunted with dogs, and when attacked showed vigorous fight. It would strike out with its feet and bite with its strong short beak, hissing like a bittern. The Natives describe its resonant metallic night-cry as resembling the sound made by two pieces of greenstone when sharply struck together.

Another remarkable flightless bird, fortunately not so scarce as the *takahea*, is the member of the *Apteryx* family commonly called by naturalists the "*roa*." The Maoris say that the proper name of this bird is the "*tokoweka*." The *tokoweka* is now plentiful on Resolution Island (Taumoana), the Government avifauna sanctuary in Dusky Sound.

Of our summer visitors the migrant *pipiwharau*, or shining cuckoo, is particularly well known to the southern Maoris. The *pipiwharau* is, of course, not confined to the South Island; it is famous amongst the Maoris all over the colony, but particularly on the coasts. It arrives with its South Sea Island cousin the long-tailed cuckoo (*koekoea*) about October, and leaves our shores again for its winter quarters in northern Australia and New Guinea about the end of February. Like the English cuckoo, the *pipiwharau* is regarded as the harbinger of spring. The Southland Natives call it "*Te Manu-a-Maui*" (Maui's Bird), because its notes when heard in the spring are a signal to begin the planting—Maui being the tutelary deity of the gardens and cultivations. Its sweet and frequently repeated notes, heard

oftenest around the seashore and in the coppices which compose the outer fringes of the forest, are sometimes interpreted by the Maoris as "*Ku-i, ku-i! Whiti-whiti ora!*" concluding with a long "*Tio-o!*" "*Whiti-whiti-ora*" may be translated as meaning "safely crossed," in allusion perhaps to the bird's safe arrival after its long flight across the ocean. Its song is also construed as a command to the *kumara*-planters—

Ko-o-ia, koia, kora;  
Tiria, turia, tiria;  
Whatiwhatia, whatiwhatia

bidding the people dig away, break up their mother earth and prepare the soil for the reception of the seed *kumara*.

There is a very ancient planting-song called "*Te Tewha-o-Maui*" ("*The Chant of Maui*"), used on the occasion of *kumara*-planting in the Hot Lakes District, particularly on the Island of Mokoia, in Lake Rotorua. It is rather curious to find that a portion of exactly the same song is heard in the extreme south, where the Murihiku Maoris put it into the mouth of the *pipi-wharauroa*. Legend says that it was from Maui (who was credited with being able to effect remarkable "lightning changes," after the manner of the heroes in the "*Arabian Nights*") that the Maori ancestors first heard the *kumara*-planting incantations. The demi-god transformed himself into a bird and sang this *tewha* as he sat perched on the handle of a *ko* or digging-implement. So that this song (which is too long to quote here) was brought from the old home of the Maoris in the islands of Polynesia, and is therefore of great antiquity.

Straying again for a moment to the North Island—there is a Maori monthly newspaper published at Gisborne called the "*Pipwharauroa*" after this interesting bird. Its Maori correspondents take poetic flights that are quite in keeping with the name of the journal. They address the paper as "*My dear little bird,*" and enjoin it to bear their words all over the Island upon its wings. And the editor, too, is not without poetry in his soul, for he heads his list of subscribers (sadly dilatory ones, I am sorry to see) with the words "*Nga hua kareao mo ta tatou manu,*" which means "*Supplejack-berries to feed our bird.*"

A beautiful bush-musician in the South Island—which we unfortunately seldom or never hear in the North—is the bell-bird (*korimako* or *makomako*). In Otago, Southland, and Stewart Island the Natives call it the "*koparapara*." It is very delightful to a bird-lover from the North Island to note the plentiful numbers and the tameness of the bell-bird in such places as Akaroa (where it has developed a taste for *pakeha* plums and pears and cherries, and for the flowers of the *Acacia*), and in most of the wooded parts of Otago, Southland, and Stewart Island.

A strange bird in Maori eyes is the *hakuai* of the off-shore islands in the far south. The Natives of Foveaux Strait and Stewart Island sail off in March and April every year to the craggy islets near the rugged west coast of Stewart Island for their annual mutton-bird harvest, and it is there that they meet with the *hakuai*. Whole families go mutton-birding—men, women, and children—and camp on the islands for some weeks. At night the fowlers gather round their camp-fires, and old songs are sung and folk-tales and ghost-stories retold. And in the darkness sometimes they hear the ghost-bird screaming its “*Haku-ai, haku-ai, Ooh!*” and then a hair-raising swoosh of great wings as some mysterious creature of the crags sweeps past them into the night, crying as it goes. This bird, called the “*hakuai*” from its cry, is spoken of as a spirit. To see it is an evil omen; it is the banshee of the islands. The Maoris say it has been frequently heard on Herekopare or Mummy Island, which lies off the entrance to Paterson Inlet, and on the islands off the south-west cape of Stewart Island. One is reminded of Blackmore’s description of the moorland birds in “*Lorna Doone*” “—Vast lonely birds, that cried at night and moved the whole air with their pinions, yet no man ever saw them”—and again of the *hokioi* of North Island legend, the great war-bird of which the song says—

Two fathoms long are its pinions;  
Its wings make a booming noise.  
It lives in the open space of heaven,  
The companion of the crashing thunder.

The mystery of the *hakuai* may be dispelled by assuming it to be—as it no doubt is—the frigate-bird (*Fregata aquila*). The wings of these lords of the seas have a great spread.

The *kotuku*, the beautiful white heron or crane, so famous in Maori poetry and proverb, is still to be found in one or two parts of the South Island. It is many years since one was seen in the North. It is said that there are some stray *kotuku* occasionally to be seen in the southern bays of Stewart Island. But the only place to my own knowledge where this rare species yet exists is in the Okarito Lagoon, a labyrinth of tidal creeks and sandbanks and small islands down on the West Coast, about ninety miles south of Hokitika. This lagoon swarms with all kinds of waterbirds and waders, and amongst them are some white herons. One of these birds is frequently seen, and ventures right into the Okarito Township. He is often observed fishing in stately solitude in a little pond just at the back of the local hotel; and he seems to know he is safe—no gun is ever raised against the white spirit-like bird of the lagoon. Certainly there is little to disturb him in Okarito—the very “*deadest*” of all

the dead "boom" towns of the old digging days. The southern Maoris say that the *kotuku* is an inhabitant of the nether world, the spirit-land of the *Reinga*. An old funeral lament ends with these words, in apostrophe to the departed: "*Ko te kotuku to tapui, e Tama—e!*" ("The white heron is now thy sole companion, O my son!")

The beautiful onomatopoeic Maori names of many New Zealand birds have no doubt been remarked upon by some of our nature-lovers. A considerable number of our indigenous birds derive their names from their cries and songs. To enumerate a few, there are the *kuku* (or pigeon), the *koko* (or *tui*, the parson-bird), the *kaka* parrot, the *hakoakoa* (seabird), the *whio* (blue mountain duck), *kea* (mountain parrot), and the *riroriro*, the little grey warbler. One can readily understand how these names came to be given, particularly in the case of the wild pigeon; *ku-ku* is simply an imitation of the sound uttered by the bird as it flaps from tree to tree, or sits up in the branches feasting on the berries—literally a "coo," the softest, most loving of forest calls. The *whio*, or "whistler," generally called the blue mountain duck, is much more abundant in the South Island than the North, and is to be seen at particularly close quarters on such routes as the foot-track leading through the mountains from Lake Te Anau to Milford Sound. Here, in many of the clear pools and calm reaches on the Clinton River, you will see little fleets of *whio* sailing round and round, uttering now and then the peculiar cry, like a whistle with a cold in it, that has gained for them their Maori name. They have never learned to fear man or his gun, and their confidence and tameness are pretty to see. Finally, there is the *kea*, the remarkable alpine parrot, the outlawed of squatterdom. Far up in the mountains, in the wastes of rock and ice, the *kea*'s scream will be heard, as he circles round you on the cliffs, or hops across the surface of the glacier after you—for he is as inquisitive and impudent as the *weka*—yelling "Kay-ah! kay-ah!" at you at the top of his voice.

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ART. XLIII.—*On a Specific Case of Leaf-variation in Coprosma baueri, Endl.* (Rubiaceæ).

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[Read before the Philosophical Institute of Canterbury, 6th September, 1905.]

Plate LII.

*Coprosma baueri* is a common New Zealand shrub or small tree frequently occurring in exposed situations on the North Island coast. It also extends to the South Island, having its southern