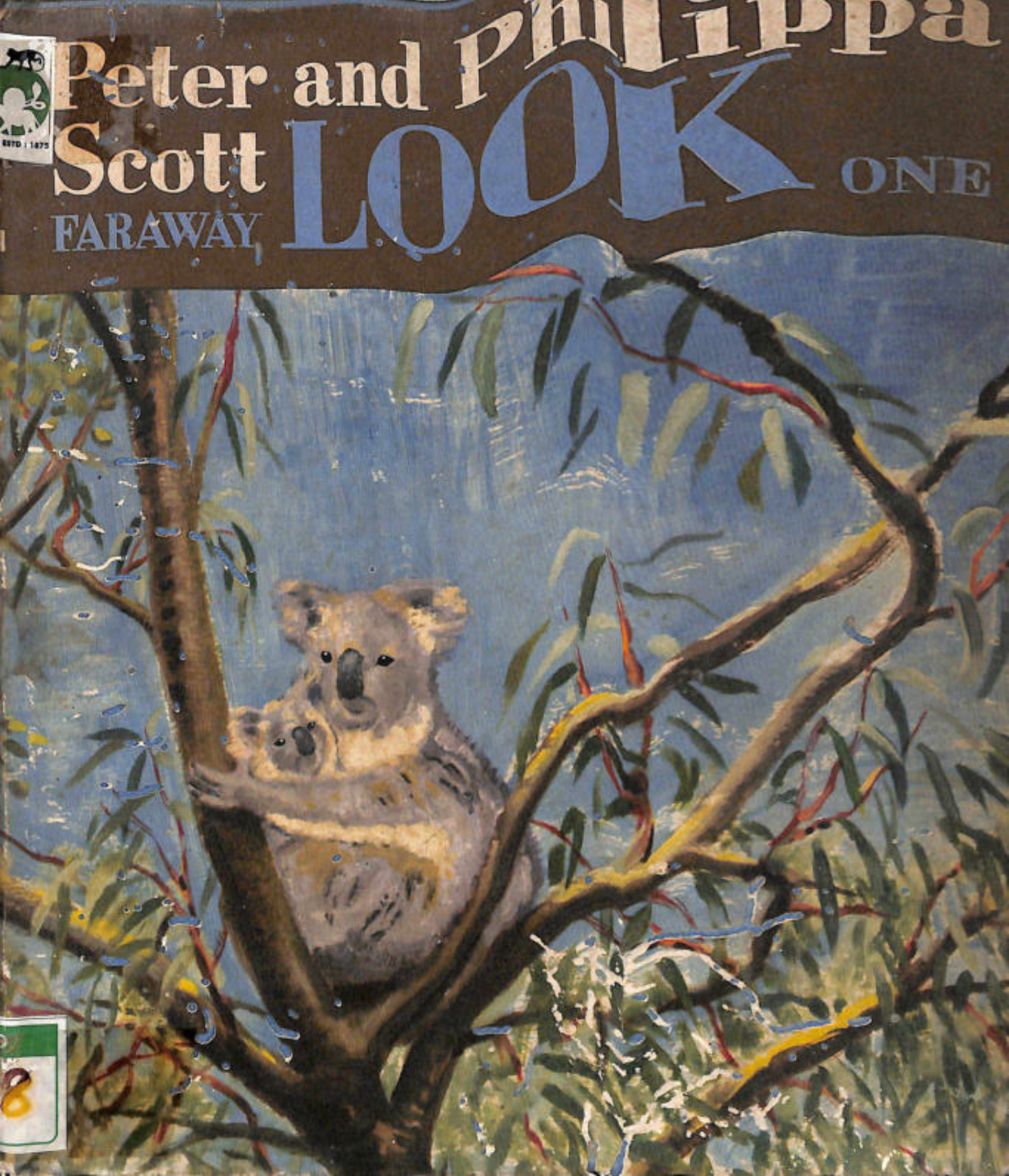
Peter and Scott
FARAWAY
Philippa
LOOK
ONE

Faraway LOOK One

by Peter and

Philippa Scott

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Foreword

In November 1956 my wife Philippa and I set out on a journey round the world which had a threefold objective. In my capacity as President of the International Yacht Racing Union I was required to attend the Olympic Games at Melbourne and to be Chairman of the International Jury for the yachting events. Such a journey obviously presented a wonderful opportunity of seeing and filming the wild life of Australia and those other countries which lay on our route for presentation on television; and finally here was a chance to see a number of species of ducks which I had never seen before. Ducks, Geese and Swans—the family *Anatidae* has been my special study for most of my life, and when I left England there were seventeen of the 147 full species of *Anatidae* known to science which I had never seen alive. When I got back only nine remained to be seen (of which two are in any case probably extinct).

Accompanying us on our journey was Charles Lagus—brilliant cameraman of the Zoo Quest television series and delightful companion—whose films of our trip, together with some of mine, were subsequently shown on BBC television under the title Faraway

Look. While Charles and I were taking the films, my wife was operating two still cameras, one containing colour film, the other black and white. Inevitably the filming had priority and some of the subjects covered in film were not recorded in the still photographs. Sometimes, however, Phil scooped us and got pictures which we were unable to film. This is a book of her photographs to which we have together put a running commentary and I have added a few drawings. In it we describe only those people and those parts of the expedition which are shown in the pictures. This does not mean that we are in any way ungrateful to the many people who made the adventure possible for us, but are not mentioned by name. It simply means that we do not have good pictures of them.

The three of us travelled almost entirely by air and were seldom more than two or three days in the same place. We flew by way of Amsterdam, Rome, Basrah, Karachi, Rangoon, Bangkok and Singapore to Darwin, Australia.

Humpty Doo

Our first objective in Australia was a place called Humpty Doo, where an Australian scientist was working on Magpie Geese and their relation to the rice crop. It all sounded rather improbable; the name of the place and the wild geese in the intense tropical heat, and—most remarkable of all—the report that the geese roosted in the tops of trees.

Humpty Doo is about fifty miles south-east of Darwin in the Northern Territory of Australia, on the edge of the flood plains of the Adelaide River and consists, or at least consisted when we were there, of a few huts in the bush and huge areas of land under development for a rice-growing project. The Magpie Geese are in fierce competition with this project. They have fed on wild rice hereabouts for centuries and can hardly be blamed for failing to discriminate between the wild and the cultivated varieties. We saw them in flocks of up to 4,000 at a time, and from a light aircraft we counted them one day over the rivers to the east in Arnhem Land. At the end of the day we reckoned we had seen 100,000 geese.

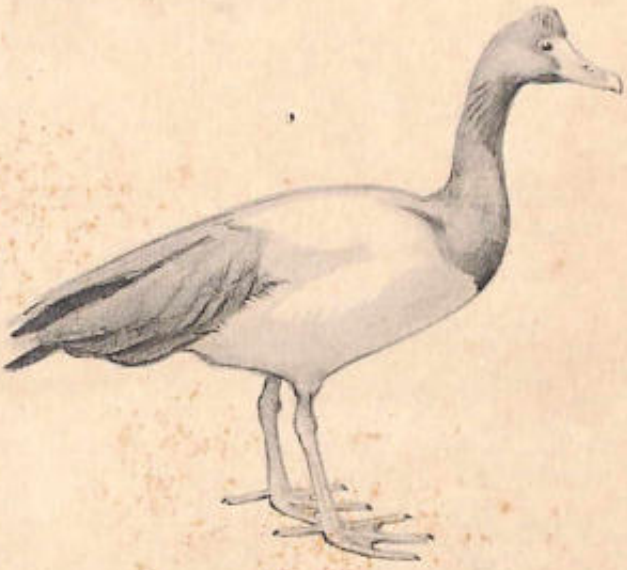
Land under development for the rice-growing project at Humpty Doo

Driving through the bush to a marsh where we found Magpie Geese

Home of the Magpie Geese. Flood plains of the Adelaide River seen from the air

In my hide (or 'humpy')

Magpie Geese

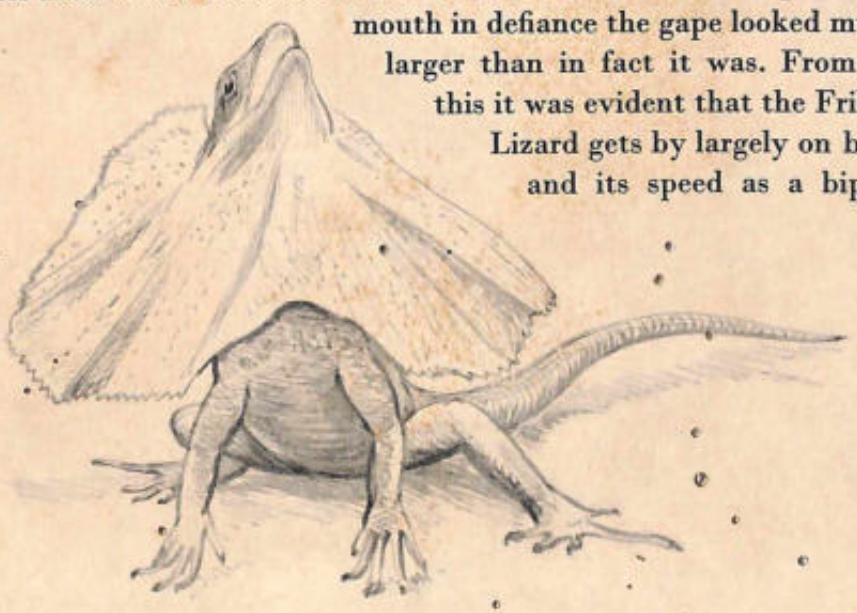


Above: *The two-and-a-half foot long Frilled Lizard*
Left: *Head and neck of a Magpie Goose*

Magpie Geese

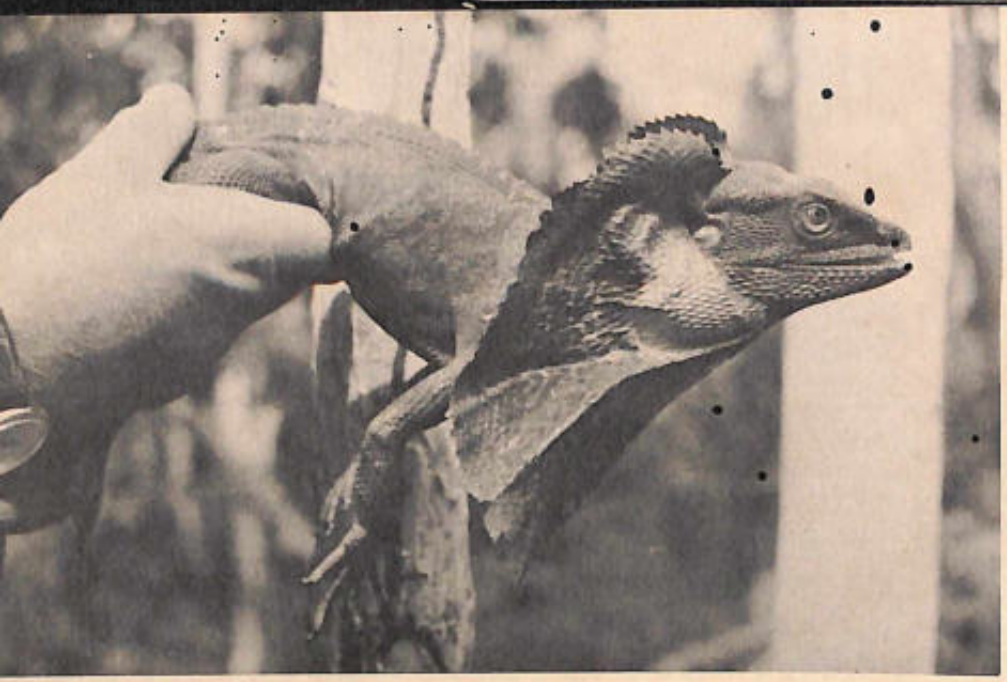
They are weird looking creatures with long orange legs, semi-palmated (only half-webbed) feet, ugly faces and strange clarinet-like calls. Twice we watched them going to roost in trees at dusk and wondered if perhaps this un-gooselike behaviour had developed because of ground predators such as dingoes, or whether it was a habit retained from their distant and perhaps stork-like ancestors. Magpie Geese are certainly a very different branch of the family from all other geese, divided from the main stem of the family tree near the bottom of the bole.

In the pandanus trees which grew thickly at the edges of the swampy areas round the flood plains we found one day a very spectacular two-and-a-half-foot lizard. It ran up a tree stump and pretended not to be there. We stalked it through the bush and finally, creeping up on it, grabbed it by the base of its tail. It was a Frilled Lizard which rejoices in the scientific name of *Clamydosaurus kingi*—a handsome creature with a large frill which was normally folded but could be spread in order to make the animal look twice the size. It surprised us very much by standing up and running on its hind legs when we put it on the ground. The orange colour inside its mouth was extended at the corners so that when it opened its mouth in defiance the gape looked much larger than in fact it was. From all this it was evident that the Frilled Lizard gets by largely on bluff and its speed as a biped.



A Stumped-tailed Lizard, showing us his beautiful blue tongue

Eucalyptus flowers with a Damsel Fly



Frilled Lizard

From Perth to Pinkears

From the Northern Territory we flew to Perth in Western Australia, where almost the first birds we saw were Black Swans. We did not see them, as might have been expected, on the Swan River, but they were on many of the small lakes round this fine city. In Australia they behave rather like Mute Swans in England, so that near the towns they become quite tame and come to be fed.

On the Swan River, however, we found a small party of Australian Avocets feeding along the edge of the shallows. Their heads are chocolate-brown, unlike the European Avocet which has a black crown, but we found them just as beautiful and graceful with their delicately up-tilted bills.

Western Australia was full of lizards and strange small creatures, but the delightfully named Pink-eared Duck which we had hoped to see turned out to be extremely elusive. The reptiles though were curiously endearing. The largest and most difficult to catch was the Racehorse Goanna, a Monitor Lizard which, as its name

An armful of baby Koalas

A Fairey Penguin in the Bass Strait

Black Swans

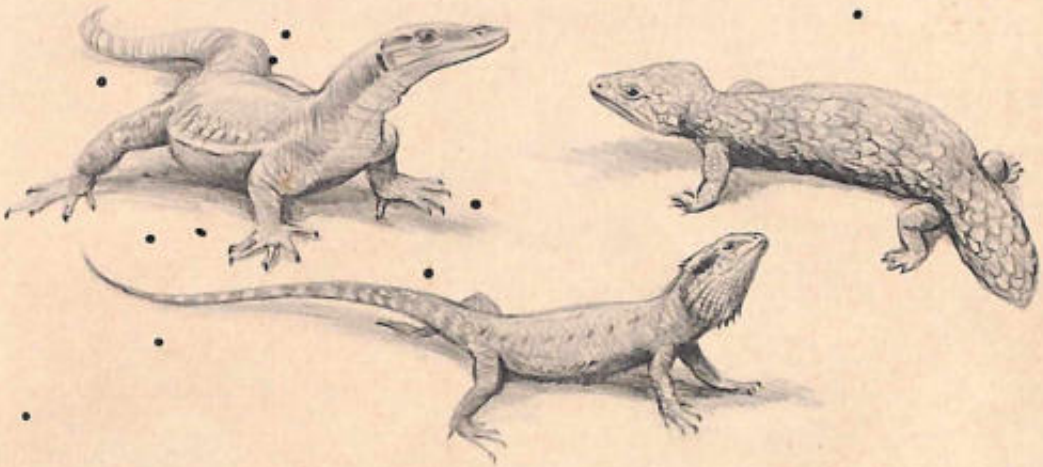
Australian Avocets

Cape Barren from Fisher Island

Mesembrythemum *on Fisher Island*

A Racehorse Goanna

An Agamid Lizard, the Bearded Dragon



suggests, is able to move at great speed. Goanna is probably a corrupt abbreviation of Iguana. They are about three feet long and bite if you handle them carelessly. The little Bearded Dragon with its spiny scales was a more easily manageable animal and quite friendly in the hand. So too were the sometimes black, sometimes yellow and brown Stump-tailed Lizards, which when provoked would open their mouths to reveal a beautiful blue tongue. They are also called Shingle-backs, presumably because of their large scales and broken colour pattern.

As we had not been able to get good film of Pink-eared Ducks in Western Australia, we made another expedition in search of them to a place called Gum Crik, about two hundred miles west of Canberra near the town of Griffith—the centre of a rich fruit-growing area. In Australia there must be an enormous number of 'creeks' overhung by gum trees, but this particular Gum Crik was on no account to be confused with Gum Creek—an almost identical waterway only a few miles away. For two years it had been unusually wet and wherever we went we saw gaunt grey tree trunks rising

Shaw-Meyer's Tree Kangaroo, New Guinea

Downy young Pink-eared Ducklings

In search of the Pinkears at Gum Crik

Pinkears

out of shallow water. But the floods which had killed the trees had at the same time been greatly to the advantage of the ducks, most of which breed only in wet seasons in Australia. The Pinkears were shy and we got no still photographs of them because the hide (or humpy as the Australians call it) which we hastily constructed of eucalyptus branches and tufts of Patterson's Curse, was occupied entirely by the cine-cameras; but we were lucky enough to find a farmer who had hatched off a brood of Pinkear ducklings from a deserted clutch of eggs he had found in a hollow tree trunk and put under a bantam hen. The babies were enchantingly tame and it was wonderful to be able to see them at such close quarters. Their bills were exact miniatures of the adult Pinkear bill, which is very long for a duck and has little flaps of soft skin hanging down on either side near the tip, giving it a curious square look.

The pink ear of the Pink-eared Duck is a small bright pink spot on the feathering behind the eye which is only apparent when the bird is in the hand or at least seen at very close range through powerful binoculars. Otherwise they are pale-grey birds with rather bold black barring on the flanks and a characteristic black pattern on the head. Their food evidently consists of very minute organisms —often perhaps blue-green algae—for which the bill is well adapted. But they must collect only very little of this at a time, for when we were watching them they were feeding almost without pause as they swam to and fro on the shallow water.

Mallee Fowl

The Mallee Hen is one of the megapodes which incubate their eggs in mounds of sand and rotting vegetation. For four years Harry Frith has been making a study of this species. In a square mile of mallee (eucalyptus scrub) he had recorded fifty-eight nests, of which about seventeen were in use each year. He had used special instruments for recording nest temperatures and had watched and filmed the birds. The Mallee Hen's year consists of a short period of courtship and nest building (usually on an existing mound). The male does all the building, then digs a hole in the top into which the female lays one egg which is covered up and, in the early part of the season, incubated by the heat of the decaying organic matter. A week later, she lays another egg, and so on throughout the winter and early spring, until more than twenty eggs have been laid. Apart from laying the eggs she has nothing further to do with the nest or the young. The male alone controls the temperature, thrusting his head into the nest and probably using his tongue as a thermometer.

Mallee Fowl ('Joe') at his nest

Harry Frith throwing up sand from the nest of the Mallee Fowl, alongside an old rabbit fence. Joe is behind the sand cloud, shovelling it back

According to his findings he either heaps sand on to the ten-foot diameter nest mound or scratches it off. There is an intricate interaction between the heat of the decaying mallee leaves and twigs and the heat of the sun. Towards the end of the six months' laying season almost all the heat is derived from the sun, as the vegetable heat is expended and the midsummer sun is so hot. The chicks hatch in mid-heap and somehow or other fight their way to the surface. They are entirely independent and neither parent pays any attention to them. They have to rear themselves separately, as only one hatches each week. The principal enemy of the Mallee Hen is the European Fox, reputedly introduced into Australia for fox-hunting and now immensely numerous. It digs up and eats the

eggs. In the course of studying the Mallee Hen, Harry had found a bird, Joe, which was exceptionally tame and confiding. He took us to its nest and, sure enough, there was Joe, a much larger bird than I had expected—as big as a female turkey. Harry sat on the edge of the nest throwing sand up into the air. The red dust floated down in cascades which were too much for Joe. He advanced to the nest, looked over the edge of the hole which Harry had dug, turned his back and started to throw the sand back in again. He was five feet away from Harry as he worked; I was ten feet away and in full view as I filmed. Charles Lagus was thirty feet away, also filming, and Philippa was taking stills. Nothing seemed to upset Joe.

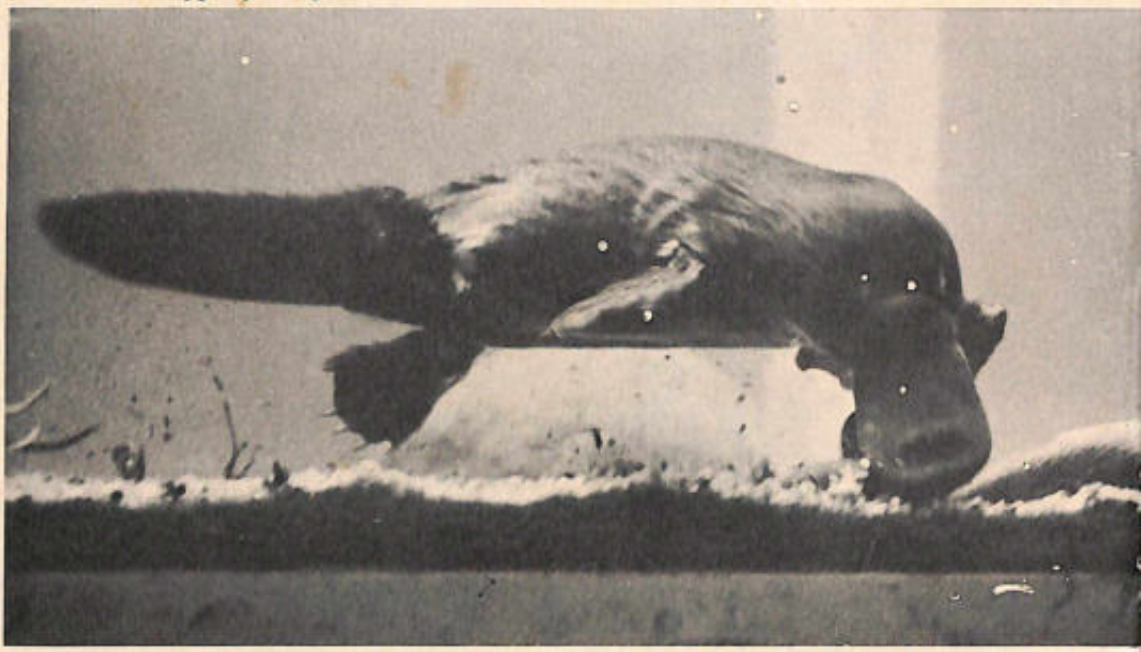
Harry Frith and I sitting in the Mallee Fowl's nest while examining the eggs

Sir Colin McKenzie Sanctuary.

Not far from Melbourne, at Healesville, is a beautiful sanctuary for Australian animals, named after Sir Colin McKenzie who founded it in 1920, though it is now maintained by the State of Victoria. The sanctuary could be described as a wild kind of zoo, where the animals live in large enclosures in the natural forest. We spent two days watching and photographing there when we should more properly have been attending formal functions and meetings connected with the Olympic Games. It was there that we first became acquainted with the Duck-billed Platypus, which is not an easy animal to see in the wild state; nor is it easy to keep in captivity. In the photograph a full-grown male Platypus is being handled by Mr Gasking, Curator of the sanctuary, and to some extent the animal has become used to this treatment. But we were warned that too long a time in the hand would upset him, as they are very highly strung creatures. To me he was surprisingly large—about two feet long—and the fur was superbly soft to touch. He

Duck-billed Platypus

Duck-billed Platypus feeding



An Echnida or Spiny Anteater coming out of its burrow

carries a dangerous weapon in the shape of a poison spur on the inside of each hind leg which he will use if angry or frightened. The bill is huge and broad and improbable. We watched him being fed on live worms in a large clear tank. He appeared to swim with his eyes shut, finding the food by feel or perhaps smell in some extraordinary way.

We had never before been on terms of familiarity with an Echidna or Spiny Anteater. At Healesville there were several. To my mind they have great charm—in appearance like a cross between a porcupine and a hedgehog they have a windswept, abandoned look. Like the Platypus, they are primitive egg-laying marsupials, which keep their babies in pouches (facing backwards). Their hind feet also face backwards which somehow makes them even more endearing. The one in the photograph has just come up out of its burrow.

On our first day at Healesville someone had brought in a baby Wombat which had been found in the road after its mother had been run over. It was being bottle-fed by Mrs Gasking and was completely unafraid. It liked to be cuddled by humans but evidently longed for attention from an elderly spinster Wombat called Alice. Alice had been at Healesville for some time and was rather embarrassed by the attentions of the baby. It was grey with a pink nose and pink paws and no one (except apparently Alice) could have resisted the urge to adopt it.

The Red Kangaroos and the Wallabies at Healesville have fine big

The baby Wombat at the Sir Colin McKenzie Sanctuary

Close-up of a Wallaby

Red Kangaroo

Wallabies

The baby Wombat at the Sir Colin McKenzie Sanctuary

Close-up of a Wallaby

Red Kangaroo

Wallabies

Australian Pelican

enclosures and seemed to spend most of their time scratching. But then that is a characteristic habit with them and does not indicate that they have more fleas than other animals. The fate of the many species of Kangaroos and Wallabies in Australia hangs in the balance, for they are herbivorous animals, and as such they compete with sheep. Some of the local species are already quite rare. It is to be hoped that some reserves or national parks will shortly be created in order to ensure the continued existence of these unique marsupials.

The Australian Pelican is large and white, with more black on his wings than the other large white pelicans of the world. This one was also remarkably tame.

Koalas

Toy Koalas are mostly made of either Kangaroo or rabbit fur. A real Koala is infinitely softer. The fur is really deep. We went to Phillip Island, seventy miles from Melbourne, especially to see them. Here they are given complete protection and we found them perfectly wild, dotted about among the branches of the special eucalyptus trees on which they feed. They are nocturnal animals and were very sleepy and loath to be disturbed, but we were amazed by their tameness. I climbed a tree to get nearer to a mother with a baby in her arms. The father was higher up in the next tree but he took no interest in my activities. I stroked the mother and she simply looked round at me. After a while the baby climbed round on to her back, and only when I tried to lift it did it take fright and clamber off across the top of my head to another branch. The mother followed it, but without any undue haste or apparent anxiety.

Baby Koala out on a limb . . . and with mother

A Green Mantis in larval form, New Guinea

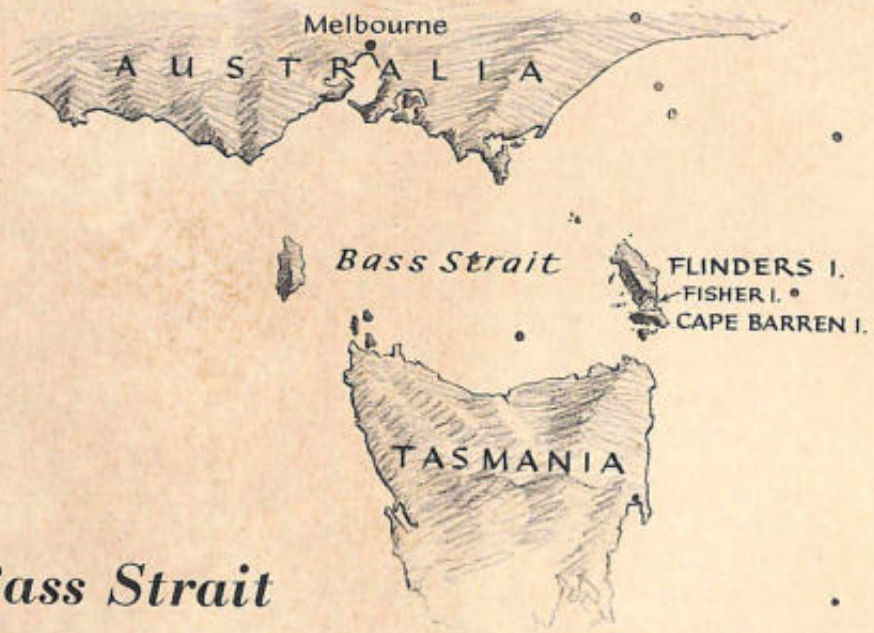
Making friends with the Koalas

Later we met some other semi-tame Koalas at Sir Edward Hallstrom's private sanctuary near Sydney and here we were able to handle some of the young ones. They have very sharp claws with which they normally hang on to the branches and they still tend to use these when they are being held, and when they begin to get restless and to scrabble about they turn into an unruly armful. But all the same they are irresistible animals.

This lovely beard grass was growing all over the sand dunes on Phillip Island where the Fairey Penguins have their burrows.

The Waghi Valley, New Guinea

The Fauna Section, Sir Edward Hallstrom's station at Nondugl, showing the Salvadori's Duck pond



Bass Strait

To us the most beautiful place in Australia was Flinders Island in the Bass Strait, which lies between Tasmania and the mainland. We stayed on Fisher Island, a tiny rocky islet off the coast of the bigger island, where scientists come every year to study the Mutton Bird, living in a hut which they have called 'Yolla'—the Aboriginal name for the Mutton Bird. Its scientific name is *Puffinus tenuirostris* and it is sometimes called the Short-tailed Shearwater.

The light was very clear and bright and the wind was mostly strong. On most of the small islands grew a bright pink *Mesembryanthemum* with succulent red leaves. It was late spring and many other flowers were blooming amongst the rocks. We had come especially to see Cape Barren Geese which live and breed in captivity at Slimbridge among the collection of waterfowl. From what we saw and were told it seems evident that their total population is very small indeed—perhaps no more than 3,000 pairs. It would be tragic if this handsome and intensely interesting

species were to run the risk of total extermination, yet this may well happen if steps are not quickly taken to protect them.

Our host and guide in these parts was Dr Dom Serventy, who has been visiting these islands for a decade making a special scientific study of the Mutton Birds, those dusky Shearwaters which breed by the million in burrows on these islands and whose young are 'harvested' each year by the hundreds of thousands.

Flinders Island from Fisher Island in the Bass Strait

New Guinea Awahgas at the 'sing-sing' they gave for us

The fatty flesh of the squabs is regarded as a very tasty dish both eaten fresh and salted. We only tried the salted kind and found them more than a little reminiscent of cod liver oil.

Dr Serventy showed us how they took the tiny Fairey Penguins from their burrows and marked them with flattened rings round

Fairey Penguin with a tag on its flipper

Charles Lagus films while Dr Serventy and I look for Fairey Penguin burrows with Dr Gibson

their flippers instead of normal rings round their legs. The tarsus of a penguin is so short and thick that a huge ring would be required and even then it would be quickly worn down on the rocks, whereas

Mutton Bird

Mantids mating (the female has eaten the head of the male), New Guinea

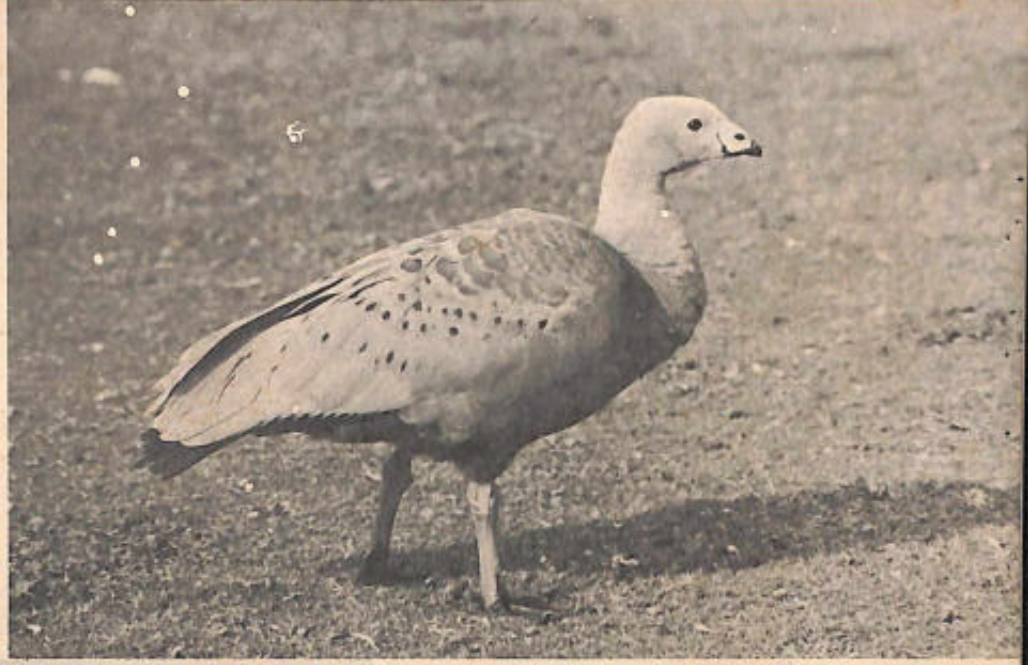
Salvadori's Duck, New Guinea

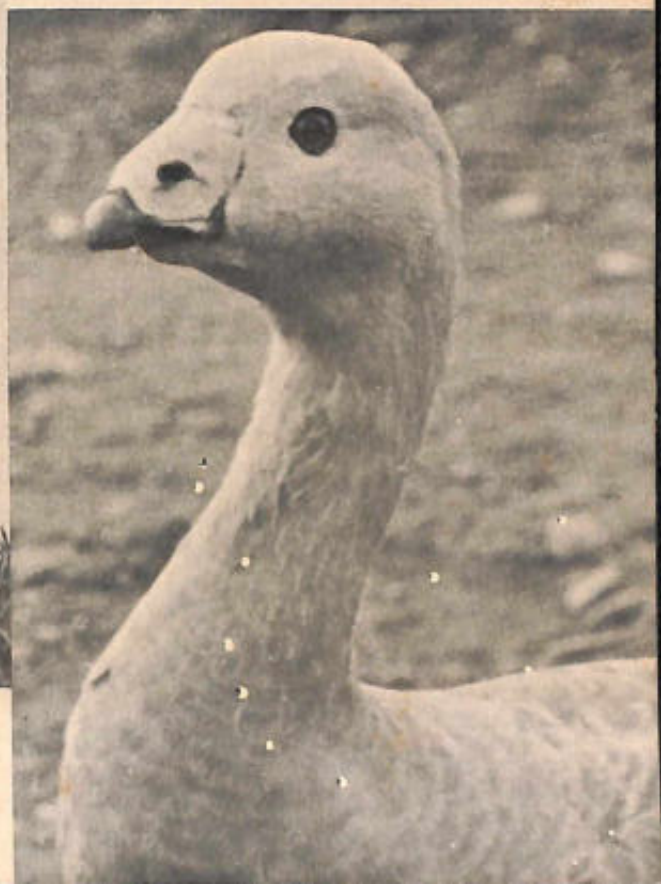
View from Rabbit Island in the Bass Strait

the ring round the flipper is subject to very little wear. The Fairey Penguins look so charming and benevolent, but peck viciously with razor sharp bills when handled. The work of Dr Serventy and his assistants on the sea birds of the Bass Strait, and in particular on the Mutton Birds, has rightly been hailed by ornithologists as an important extension of our knowledge of these mysterious and largely nocturnal Shearwaters which annually (as his ringed birds have shown) fly round a figure-of-eight pattern encompassing the whole of the Pacific Ocean. Six months before we saw them in the Bass Strait our Mutton Birds had been quartering the grey wastes of the Bering Sea between Alaska and Kamchatka.

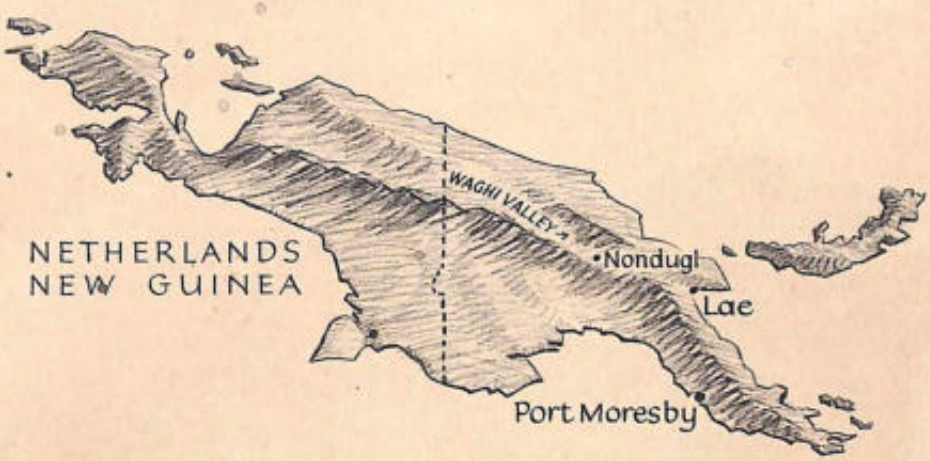
The commonest gull was the Australian Silver Gull—as gulls go, a smart, trim bird, which was pleasantly tame on and around Fisher Island.

Cape Barren or Cereopsis Geese





A young Phalanger eating paw-paw



New Guinea

One week was all we had for our visit to the highlands of New Guinea, but it was enough to show us that the place was 'very special'. Sir Edward Hallstrom invited us to visit his station at Nondugl in the Waghi Valley where besides an experimental farm he has created a 'fauna section'—a small zoological garden—containing many of the New Guinea animals. Among these were about twenty Salvadori's Ducks which I had never before seen alive. Two years later Sir Edward presented these very birds to the Wildfowl Trust and they are now at Slimbridge.

From the coast we flew up to the Waghi Valley in the DC-3 which flies in once a week. There was no other way of getting there and everything from medical supplies to farm implements and furniture comes in by air. The aeroplane lands at several small stations on its way up the valley and we were impressed by the fine natives wearing feathers and mother-of-pearl who arrived to refuel the aircraft. They were not dressed specially for the occasion; this was everyday costume.

New Guinea: the house at Nondugl in the Waghi Valley where we stayed

It was the wet season but it rained conveniently and regularly in heavy downpours between four and five o'clock every afternoon, sometimes coming in spectacular storms which hung over the hills like brilliant curtains of silver, lit from behind by the afternoon sun.

Having seen the fascinating Salvadori's Ducks on the ponds in the enclosures at Nondugl our next concern was to find and film some of them in the wild state. With the manager of the station, Frank Pemble-Smith, as our guide and some porters to carry our

A rainstorm across the Waghi Valley

Banana trees in the morning light at Nondugl

The Fauna Section at Sir Edward Hallstrom's station at Nondugl, showing one of the aviaries

Right: *Shaw-Meyer's . Tree Kangaroo*

Left: *Matschie's Tree Kangaroo, with well-grown 'joey' in her pouch*

Salvadori's Duck at Nondugl

camera equipment, we walked up a steep-sided valley with a rushing torrent. We walked for hours through lush damp tropical moss forest with tree ferns and pandanus; we crossed and re-crossed the torrent, sometimes wading through it and sometimes walking across on bamboo poles. But never a wild Salvadori's Duck did we see.

Back at Nondugl we explored the fauna section, which must be one of the most beautiful zoos in the world. It was built and maintained by Fred Shaw Meyer, the distinguished zoologist and animal collector after whom many species of birds and mammals from New Guinea have been named. The gardens are full of bright flowers and the aviaries and cages fit cleverly into the landscape, being built of split bamboo in the local native style.

New Guinea is famous for its Birds of Paradise, but they are difficult to see; indeed we only saw one wild one—a Red Bird. This was because in most areas they are now becoming very rare indeed. The natives kill large numbers for their plumes, which they make into magnificent head-dresses, used impressively in their dances. The Awahgas laid on a special dance for us—in local pidgin 'sing-sing'. It is a sad commentary that since civilization has reached these tribes, who had seen no white man twenty-five years ago, their head-dresses are more magnificent than ever before. The reason is that formerly they dared not roam the forests hunting Birds of Paradise because of the danger of ambush from their neighbours, a danger now removed by Australian law and order. Now they can safely hunt and kill every last adult male Bird of Paradise, and this they are rapidly doing.

The Tree Kangaroos captivated us completely. Many of them had 'joeys' in their pouches and they looked as cuddly as chestnut-coloured teddy bears.

Salvadori's Red Bird of Paradise

Gouvra Pigeon in the Fauna Section at Nondugl

The young Phalanger

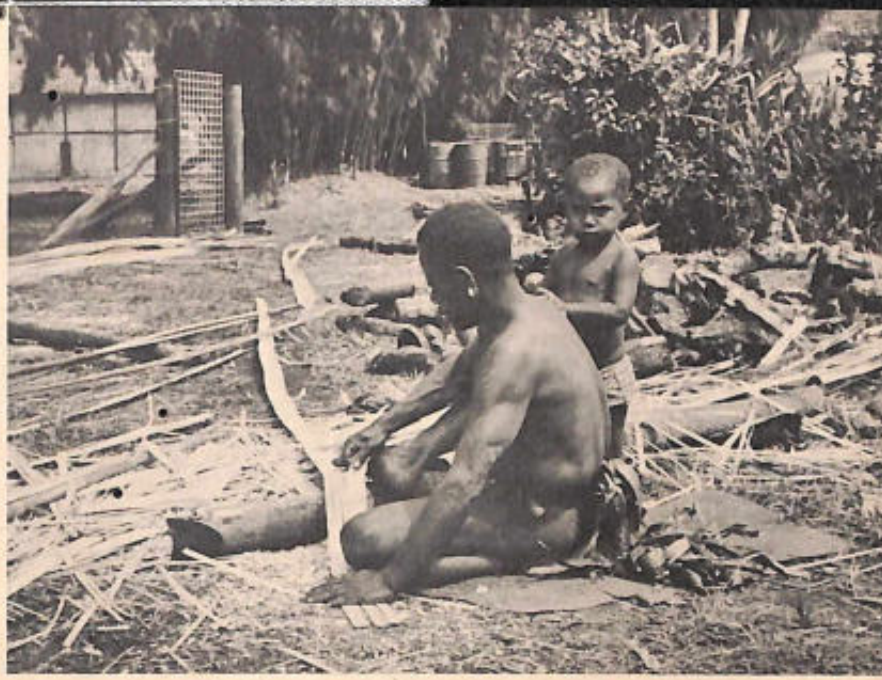
Native at the 'sing-sing' wearing a head-dress of the plumage of Salvadori's Red Bird of Paradise, and mother-of-pearl through his nose

We were particularly anxious to film and photograph some of New Guinea's fantastic insects, and so one of the natives of the Waghi tribe who acted as a kind of town crier was asked to inform the people that a reward would be given for small animals brought to us alive. The shout was taken up farther down the valley and for some time we could hear the distant voices farther and farther away spreading our request.

The first animal to be brought to us was a young Phalanger; a marsupial with almost black fur, a delightful soft creature with beady eyes and a prehensile tail, but it bit your hand if you touched it. I know because I was foolish enough to try to do so and learned the hard way why it was being carried about on a ten-foot-long branch. The native children brought paw-paw for it to eat which it

A typical native house in New Guinea

Preparing bamboos for house-building in New Guinea



I show the natives a drawing I have made of a Salvadori's Duck so that they can help us find the birds

Above: *Making the fire for our picnic lunch. When cold the natives use their arms as scarves*

Top right: *Charles Lagus films our crossing of a river on our search for Salvadori's Duck. My coat is being carried at arm's length to protect it from the porter's body dye*

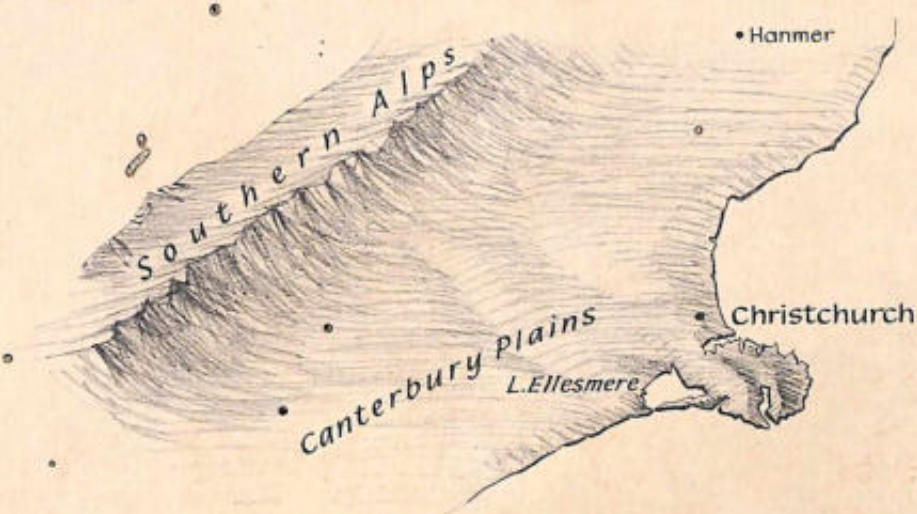
Right: *Salvadori's Duck habitat*

Salvadori's Duck

seemed to enjoy and to distinguish from their fingers when they offered it. I thought they were surprisingly brave about this.

I put a pair of Mantids in the mosquito net over my bed one night with the intention of filming them next day. They were large insects, the female perhaps five inches long. Last thing at night they were together, mating, but when I awoke in the morning the female had eaten off her husband's head. In spite of his lack of head and thorax he continued to mate with her for a further twenty-four hours and even to retain a sense of balance when removed from her. If placed on his back he would struggle to right himself. We found a rather prettier smaller Mantis with a turned-up tail, presumably the larval form, and probably of a different species, but no doubt her habits would be no less macabre when she grew up.

The Agama Lizard and the leaf-like Green Grasshopper—or more correctly Bush Cricket, were brought to us inside hollow bamboo sticks by the natives, who were highly amused at our efforts to keep these animals where we wanted them while they were photographed. So much of our time had been spent in the unsuccessful search for Salvadori's Duck that we hardly had time to film all the small creatures which the natives brought us. One week is too short a time for a naturalist in New Guinea. But it was all we had, and a great deal better than nothing.



New Zealand

Christchurch was associated with my father, for it was from New Zealand that he set off for the Antarctic, and I found the people most anxious to tell me that his memory was honoured there. Outside our hotel bedroom window was the marble statue of him carved by my mother in the marble quarries of Carrara in Italy. It looks very fine in this public garden, especially at night when it is floodlit.

Not far from Christchurch there is a great shallow lake between the Canterbury plain and the sea. On this lake there have been introduced Australian Black Swans, which are said now to number 80,000. They are surprisingly referred to as 'game' by the local people and treated as such, too. Because they are hunted they are extremely wild and we never got very close to them, even though this was the close season, when some of them still had nests with eggs or small young near the shore of the lake. Although we built a hide near one of the nests, the parents did not come back and finally we gave up for fear that the eggs would get too cold or that the birds would desert.

A downy young Black-billed Gull in its nest, Lake Ellesmere

Left: *I stand at the foot of the statue of my father, carved by mother in Carrara marble, which stands in Christchurch*

Black Swan taking off

Black-billed Gull in flight over Lake Ellesmere

The nest and eggs of a Black Swan

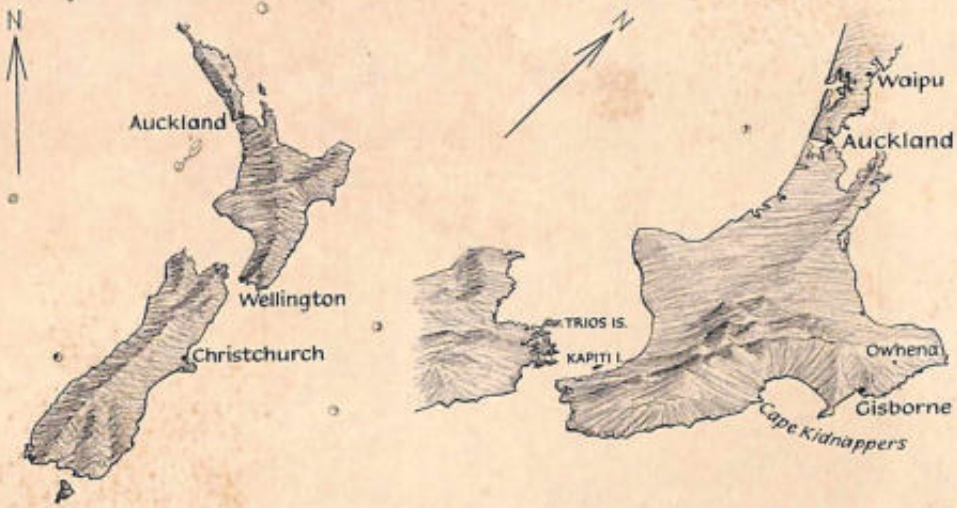
From Christchurch I had at last the opportunity of doing some gliding. At that time I was still rather new to this sport, but I was very keen to get up in a glider in country which is renowned for its good soaring conditions. The South Canterbury Gliding Club was having its holiday camp at Hanmer about eighty miles away. A kind but rather surprised ornithologist drove us to the site of the camp, which was a very beautiful place in the foothills of the Southern Alps. After one flight with the instructor I made a solo circuit in the T-31, which is a British two-seater trainer, and then had another flight of fifty-four minutes in the Australian designed two-seater Kookaburra—a very exciting experience in the rather turbulent conditions. It was my first experience of aerotow, behind a Tiger Moth, but my instructor bravely allowed me to do the flying and after a bumpy spell on the mountain face we moved out into the valley and soared successfully in thermals for the last half of the flight.

The rare Tuatara, a primitive lizard, photographed on the Trios islands in Cook Strait

A Weta, a huge cricket from the Trios islands

Adjusting my harness in the Kookaburra at Hanmer

The gliding camp of the South Canterbury Gliding Club



Cook Strait

In Cook Strait there are many small rocky uninhabited islands which hold colonies of sea birds and other strange animals. This is the last stronghold of the rare Tuatara, a very primitive lizard in whose skull remains the so-called 'third' or pineal 'eye', though the function of this vestigial organ is still obscure. The Tuatara, which grows to about two-and-a-half feet long, can quite properly be called a miniature dinosaur, for it has no relations among living lizards. It is a survivor from the age of reptiles.

We were taken to a group of islands called the Trios. On one of these there are believed to be about 3,000 Tuataras living in burrows which they share with Fairey Penguins or Fluttering Shearwaters. Reptiles and birds do not apparently interfere with one another, although the eggs and newly hatched young of the Shearwaters would be a perfectly suitable size to make a meal for a Tuatara. It used to be held that at the foot of the burrow the Tuatara was always on the left, the birds' nest on the right, but this has now been disproved.

Top: *On the Trios*

Bottom: *Fijians dancing for us at Korolevu*

We climbed the steep island by a Penguin path through the thick scrub and found our first Tuatara in a Penguin burrow. They are impressive animals, heavy of head and body, pleasantly grey-green in colour and quite steady if held comfortably. They only bite in the process of capture. This particular one had blotches of orange on its skin which were colonies of microscopic mites. The fringe of drooping white spines on the back of the neck and down the back was unexpected in that the spines themselves were quite soft. Those on the tail, on the other hand, were different and quite hard. In appearance the tail was slightly segmented, rather like a

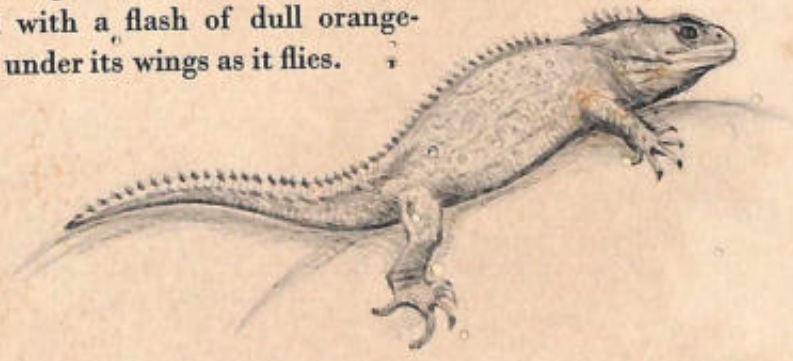
Cook Strait from the Trios

North Island Kaka

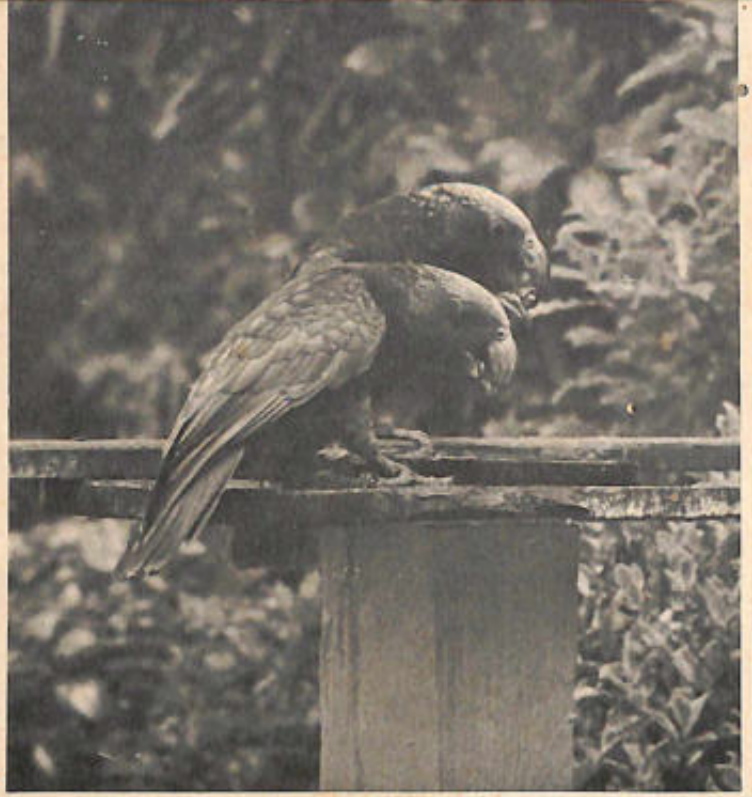
crocodile's tail. We found two small ones with regenerated tails which seemed quite normal and lizard-like. I had not previously realized that the Tuatara was capable of regenerating a broken tail. They are said to live three hundred years and only to become sexually mature at sixty, but I cannot believe these are more than old wives' tales.

While we were filming Tuataras a member of the party brought us one of the huge crickets which are peculiar to these islands. The Maori name for them is Weta, but their scientific name is *Hemideina thoracica*. The males have enormous heads and jaws and both sexes have very long antennae. They are reddish-brown and shiny with transverse stripes on the abdomen caused by paler joints to the segments. They are about three-and-a-half inches long, and really not pretty at all.

From the Trios we crossed the Cook Strait to the island of Kapiti, which lies not far out from the North Island coast. Two-thirds of Kapiti is a Government bird sanctuary. The Warden's wife, Mrs Fox, was able to show us the now rare bush parrot, the North Island Kaka, *Nestor meridionalis septentrionalis*, feeding on her bird table. It is a large dark greenish-brown parrot, spotted and barred with a flash of dull orange-red on its rump and under its wings as it flies.



Tuatara



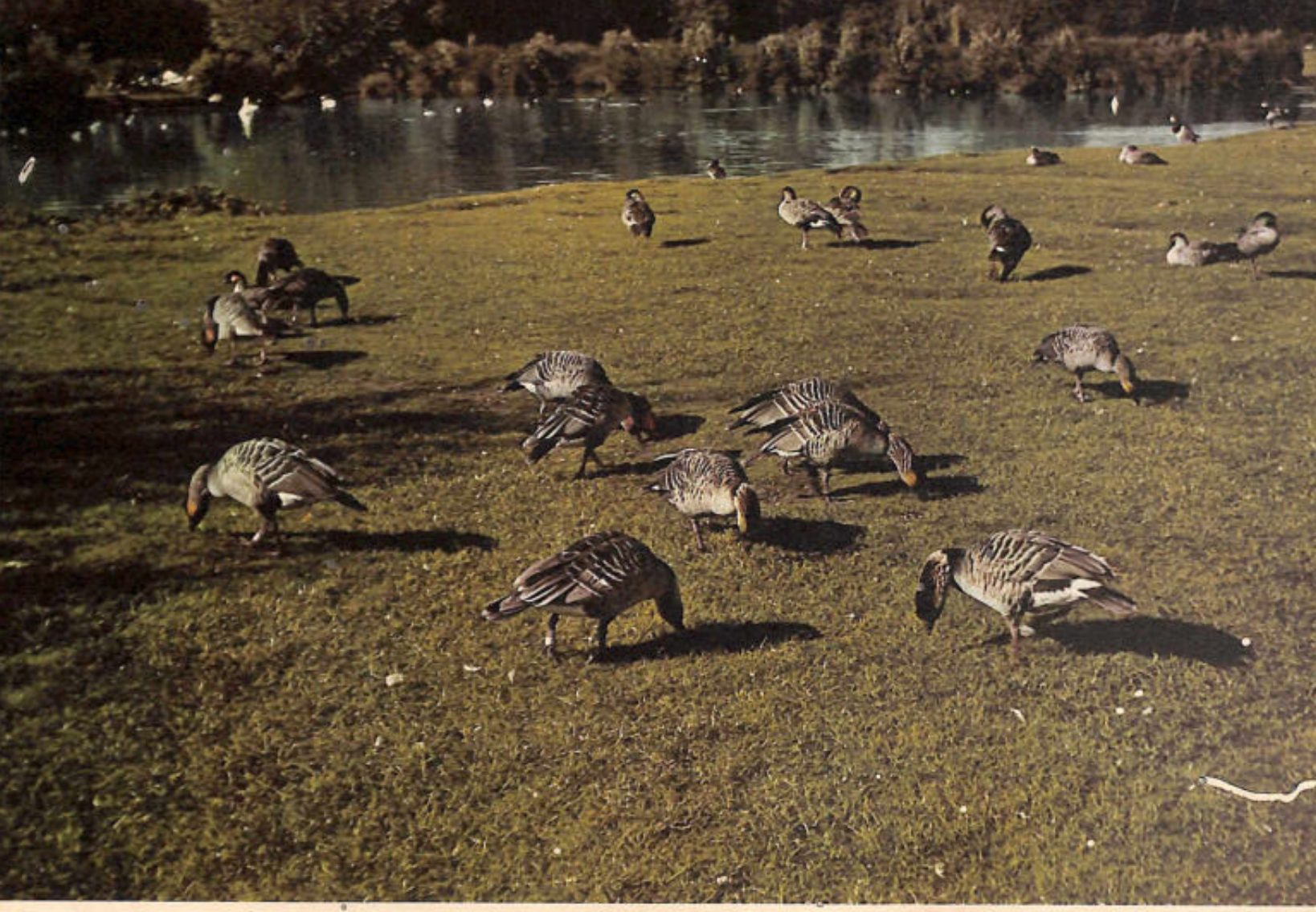
Wild Kaka feeding off a bird table on the island of Kapiti

A Tuatara

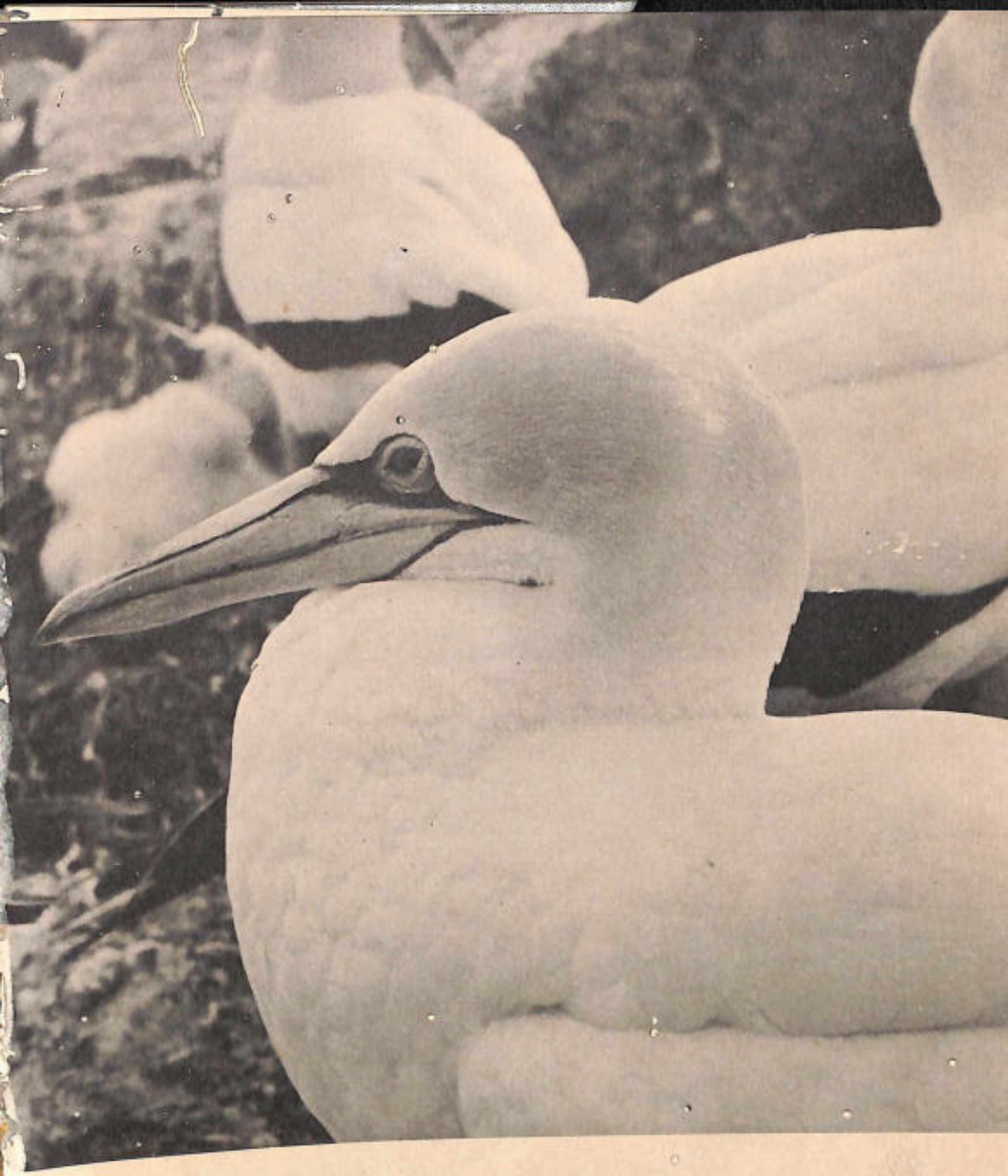
Cape Kidnappers

Our visit to the Gannet colony at Cape Kidnappers in the North Island was a striking success from the point of view of photography, and indeed for sheer beauty the place was unforgettable. We reached it by Land Rover, driving for six or seven miles over a very rough track. At last, along a knife-edge hill, we approached the final headland and drove to its top where the nesting Gannets were less than a dozen yards away. The main colony was down on a saddle below but several hundred nests were up here at our feet.

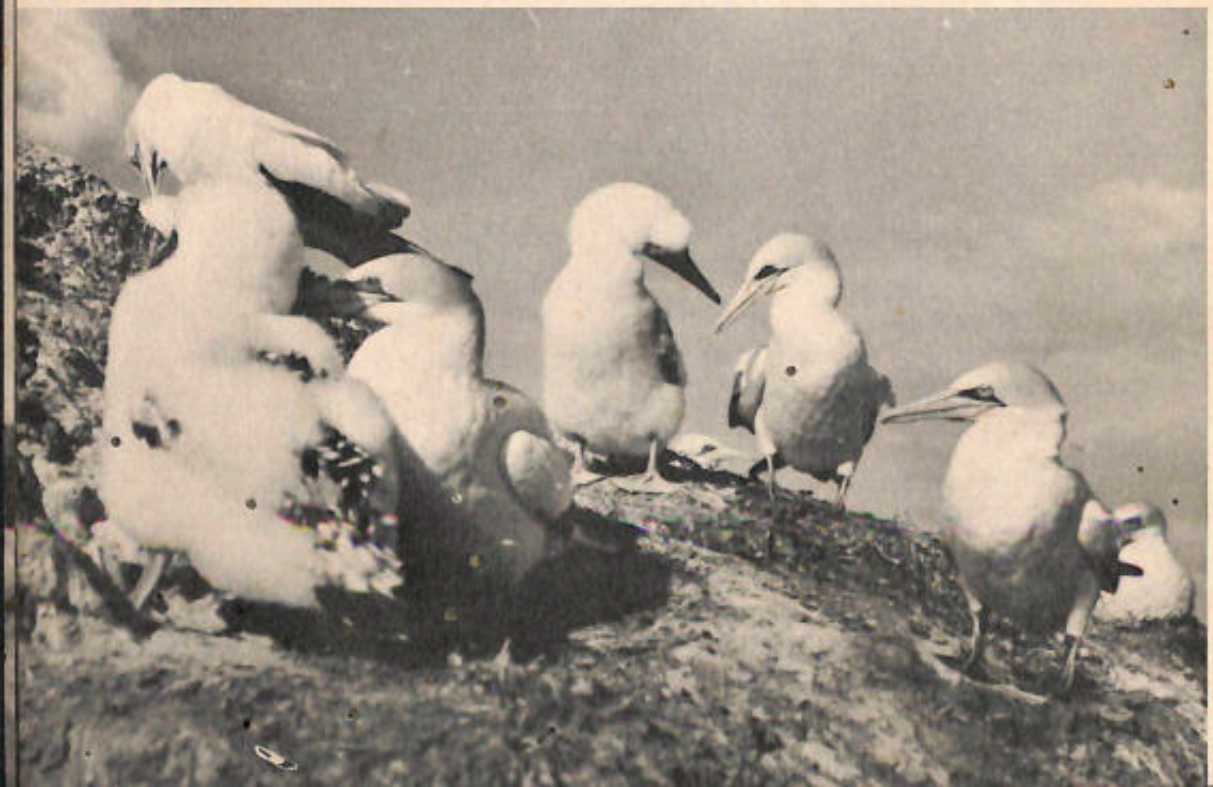
This colony is protected and the Warden, Mr Williams, organizes a number of young lads to keep a perpetual watch during the breeding season. He led us down over the cliff and up the steep path to the saddle. Here we sat and filmed, surrounded by nesting birds, on a guano-covered sloping rock, the only nest-free space in the colony. The New Zealand Gannet, *Sula bassana serrator*, seems to have a brighter yellow nape than our North Atlantic species and more black on the wings. They were absurdly tame. Their calls were delightfully musical, pairs were bill-fencing, giving an ecstatic display, and fighting. Marvellous soaring was in progress in a strong updraught. The birds hung stationary in the wind only a few feet away from us. It was a brilliant scene, clear sparkling atmosphere, bright afternoon sun, lively activity in the colony with all kinds of entertaining bickerings and battles and above the exquisite grace of the flying birds.

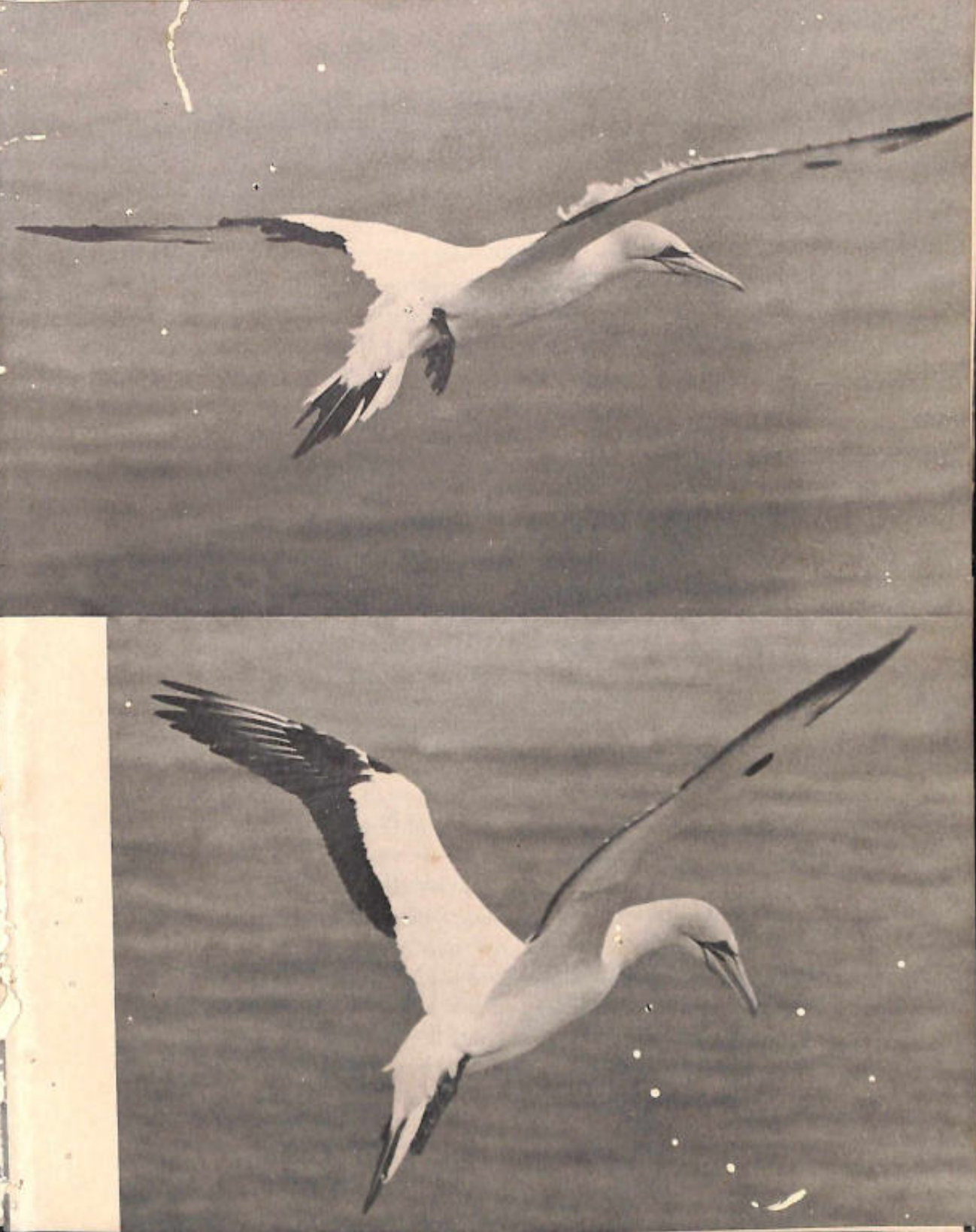


A flock of Ne-ne at the Wildfowl Trust in England



Photographs taken at the Gannet colony, Cape Kidnappers, New Zealand. When soaring over the cliffs, the birds sometimes flew so slowly as to lift the feathers from the upper surface of their wings





Mountain Ducks

Perhaps the two happiest days of our New Zealand tour were spent at a remote station to the north of Gisborne in the North Island. Owhena (pronounced Ofenner) belonged to the Maxwells, a delightful couple who kindly gave us hospitality and supplied us with horses and guides to search for the elusive Blue or Mountain Duck, *Hymenolaimus malacorhynchos*. Very little is known about the relationships of this species and when I arrived in New Zealand I had never seen a live one. Its behaviour had scarcely been described, and I soon learned that it was vastly less numerous than it had been and would soon be seriously threatened with extinction if the decline continued. On the morning after our arrival we set off in a cavalcade of sixteen horses, which was far too many, but even that could not spoil our day. At times the party was stretched out over about two miles of the valley and the chances of seeing our bird before it had flown away seemed small indeed. We rode for six hours up the steep valley of the Ruatahunga, sometimes along the bed of the river. We saw a New Zealand Grey Duck and a drake Paradise Shelduck, but still no Blue Ducks. The scenery in these hills was magnificent. We had climbed above the depressing devastation of the lower slopes, where the early settlers had burnt the bush in a fatuous effort at forest clearance and left the white bones of the tree trunks littering mile after mile of hillside. Here the slopes were covered in dense moss forest and glorious tall trees towered above the river. In due course we abandoned our horses and walked up a tributary of the river, where the trees were a tangle of moss-covered branches. The easiest way was to walk knee deep in the stream itself. It was quite dark underneath the

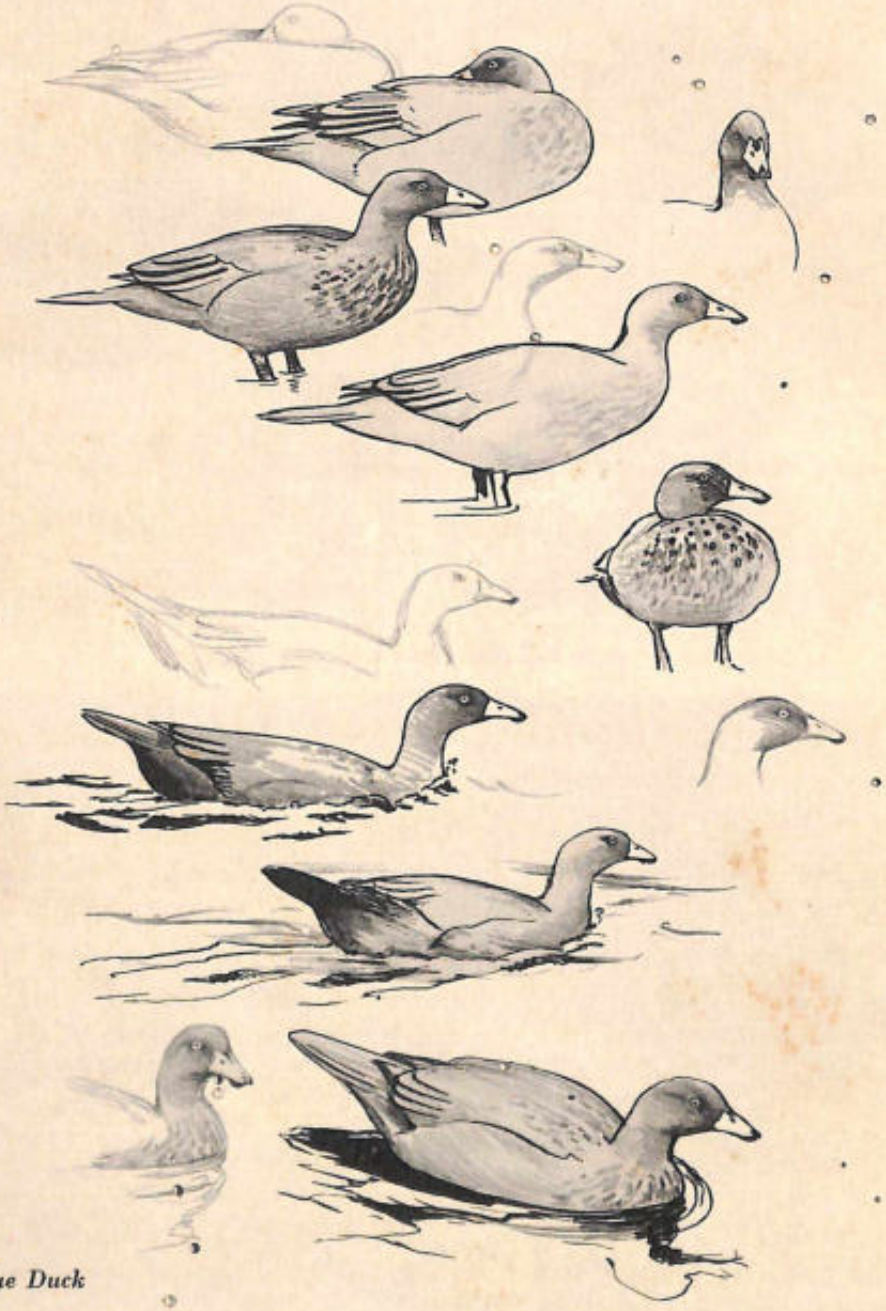
thick canopy but occasionally a shaft of light came through to illuminate the softness of it all. Suddenly we came upon our first Blue Duck sitting on a rock at the far end of a pool. For a few minutes we watched it but there was not enough light to photograph it. The bird was surprisingly wild and flew off too soon. But to have come upon this romantic duck in this wonderful setting was exciting enough. We were exhausted by the time we had retraced our way down the stream bed again to our horses. We had seen our duck but we had not filmed him. The job was less than half done.

On the following day, with fewer people, we set out on our horses for another valley. Mr Maxwell's station manager had marked down a family of Blue Ducks on a slightly nearer river. We approached the pool where the birds were supposed to be with infinite caution and finally saw them about seventy yards upstream—a pair with five young. The young were still in down though the first feathers were beginning to show. They had blue bills, prominent white cheeks and a curious golden brown spot on either side of the back. This colour contrasted sharply with the dark grey and white of the rest of the down. Against the grey of the riverbed rocks they were very hard to see. Although the female was a little nervy the family soon settled down in our presence, so long as we did not go too close. The light was good, the film cameras buzzed and the still cameras clicked. It was wonderful to see these strange ducks swimming in the white water of the rapids. We could hardly tear ourselves away from this wonderful opportunity and it was already late when we mounted and set off for the station. The horses were tired after the two long days but they made good speed all the same, as horses always do when they are going home. For ourselves we were well pleased with our day. Looking back on that pleasant adventure I can only see Owhena in the rosy glow of our final success.

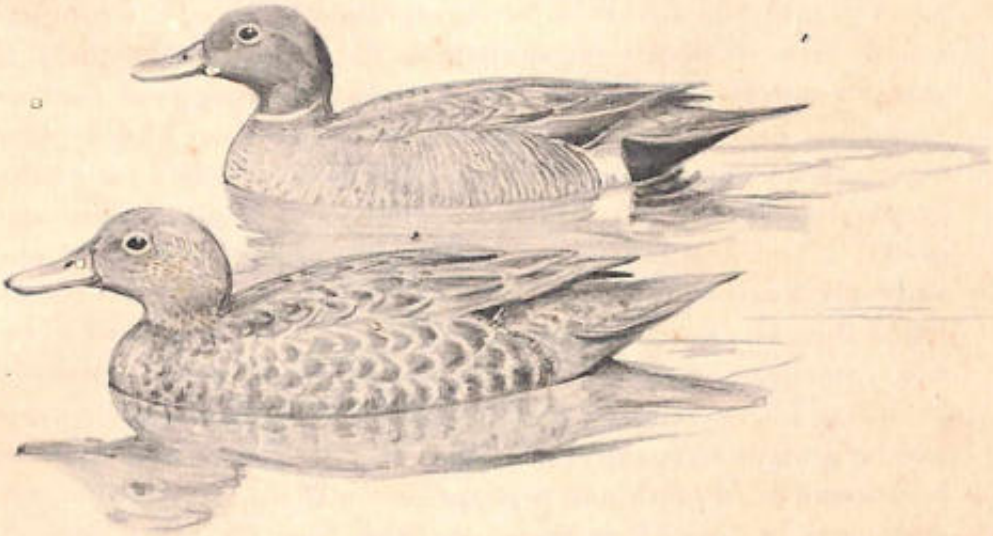
Preparing to set out on our search for the Blue or Mountain Duck at Owhena

Phil on Sheila

A pair of Blue Duck with their young



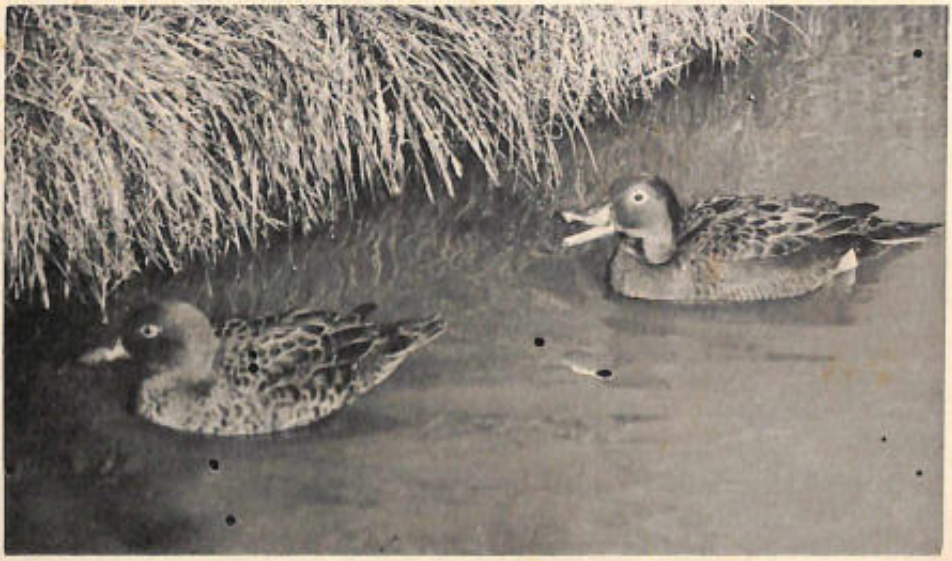
Blue Duck



New Zealand Brown Duck

The Brown Duck, *Anas chlorotis*, is one of those species which an old and valued friend once described as 'not showy but rare'. We had kept one a few years before in the Wildfowl Trust collection at Slimbridge, but to see one in the wild state would be something quite different. As with the Blue Ducks little enough was known about them and their true relationship with other members of the duck family. They appeared to be nocturnal, which adds to the difficulty of watching them in their natural habitat. At Waipu, north of Auckland, there is a sluggish narrow river winding its way through grass meadows with occasional woodland. We spent some hours trying to find the Brown Ducks here, and eventually a pair and later three more were located, but they stayed in the thick

cover and although they were extraordinarily tame, the problem was to drive them into the sunlight so that we could film them. It was not until we set off for our hotel in the failing light that we found the best ones swimming quietly by the road bridge not a quarter of a mile from the village. The light was bad for photography but there at last I learnt something new about these strange ducks. I had a grand view of the male through binoculars and suddenly I saw in it various characters of the Pintail. The Brown Duck then was not the degenerate Mallard it was supposed to be, but something very near to 'the original duck'—a genuinely primitive bird descended perhaps from a basic duck which was a common ancestor to the Mallard and Pintail. This seemed to me to be a moment of truth and perhaps one of the most valuable conclusions to be drawn from the whole of our tour, for, to me, unravelling the evolutionary sequences which have led to the species we see today is the most exciting aspect of my specialized study of wildfowl.



Fiji

By the end of our tour of New Zealand we had been travelling almost without pause for two months. The longest period we had spent in any one place was six nights in New Guinea. For the rest of the time it had been a day here, two days there and occasionally three days somewhere else. We had known we should need a break and anyway it seemed dreadful even to consider flying from Auckland to Hawaii without seeing something of a South Pacific island.

We had selected Fiji because it was on the direct air route. All we needed to do was to break the journey here and catch the plane again a week later. We landed at Nandi and after a delay caused by floods we drove eighty miles to Korolevu, which consists only of one beautiful hotel and a small Fijian village. The hotel occupies two large buildings and a cluster of tiny ones; the main entrance and dining-room are in a conventional western building, but the second is a most beautifully built Fijian bamboo structure which is

lounge and bar. No single nail or screw has been used in its construction. The beams and bamboos are tied together with rope, made and dyed locally, and used to create traditional designs in the interior. The rest of the hotel consists of thatched bamboo 'bures', each being a guest room with two beds and a wash room. The bures are arranged in three little semi-circles in the centre of each of which is an open thatched summer house, all within ten yards of the beach. Coconut palms grow among the bures and the whole thing is so skilfully done that it seems, of its kind, quite perfect. Here then we had arrived for our week's holiday to be spent 'fish-watching' on the coral reef.

We had the reef to ourselves most of the time, although occasionally some of the Fijian lads from the village came to spear fish,

sometimes climbing the palm trees in order to look down into the water.

We went out before breakfast on the first day and as soon as I put my face-mask under the water I realized that our week would be a success. The water was crystal clear and there were hosts of little fish of all shapes and sizes. We had no underwater photographic equipment with us, but we constructed a small aquarium out of five sheets of glass and some adhesive tape and filmed a few of the coral fishes in it. We finally distinguished 120 different kinds of fish, though it was not until later that I was able to put a scientific name to any of them. My knowledge of fishes, still sketchy, was then virtually non-existent, but our Fijian experiences gave some impetus to our new-found interest in ichthyology.

Fijians looking for fish to spear

The track to the village at Korolevu

The 'bures' in the village

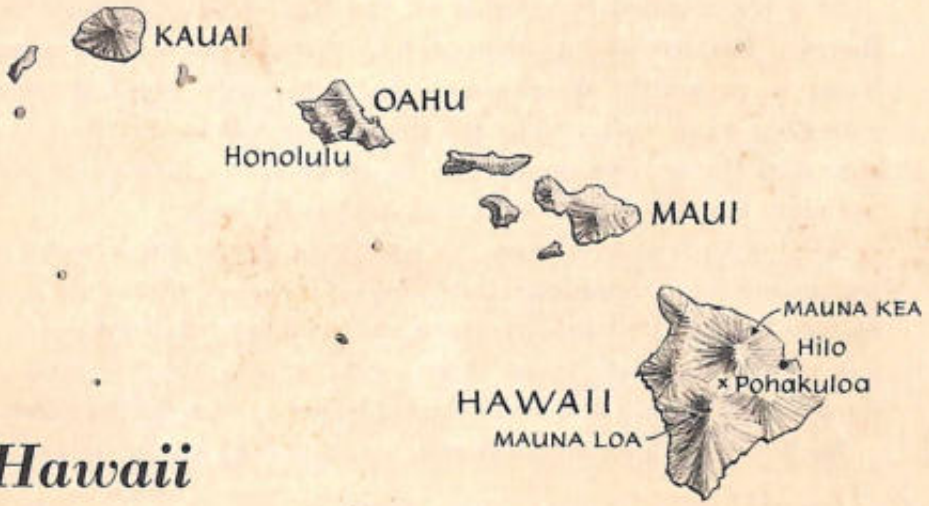
Fijian dancer

Fijian war dance

We visited the village a mile along the coast from the hotel—a clean and orderly place where we were received by the headman to whom we could only bow and smile as we had no common language.

Then one day the men from the village came in all their war paint and palm-leaf skirts and danced for us on the lawn at the hotel. They were wild war dances with spears and clubs, executed with superb precision and grace to the music of a drum and a group of chanters sitting in a round bunch on the grass and beating sticks together. At the end of the dancing the leader made 'kava', the Fijian native drink. It was prepared ceremonially in a large wooden bowl and a half coconut-full which must be drained dry was brought to each of us in turn. As the bowl was lowered empty the men uttered a long-drawn-out 'Aaaah'. It tasted of muddy water, slightly astringent with a flavour of sacking.

It was an unforgettable week. Fiji had come up to all our expectations as an enchanted Pacific isle.



Hawaii

I had wanted to go to Hawaii ever since, twenty-five years ago, Herbert C. Shipman had promised to give me a pair of Ne-ne or Hawaiian Geese if I would go and fetch them. But the war had intervened. After it, in 1950, he had kindly allowed John Yealland, then Curator of the Wildfowl Trust's collection, to bring a pair back to England when returning from a visit in which he had demonstrated in Hawaii the techniques used for rearing geese in captivity. This 'pair' turned out to be two females and a gander was sent over the following year. Since then the flock has gradually grown at Slimbridge. It was very exciting to have these beautiful birds—the rarest geese in the world—on one's doorstep, but it would be more thrilling still to see them in their wild surroundings. At the end of the war the population of Hawaiian Geese was probably at its lowest ebb. The introduction of mammals which had subsequently run wild—pigs, dogs, mongooses—and the spread of human population had so seriously reduced them that less than fifty were left, some of them in captivity in Mr Shipman's garden.

At a place called Pohakuloa on the big island of Hawaii the Board of Forestry and Agriculture had started a project for rearing Ne-ne in captivity. Mr Shipman had generously supplied them with their basic stock and by the time of our visit in 1957 they had increased the captive population to about thirty birds. But still not more than thirty had been seen in the wild state.

We flew to Honolulu from Fiji (gaining a day in our lives when we crossed the international date line) and stopped there only long enough to meet Dr Paul Breese, to be shown his delightful zoo and the small group of Ne-ne there, and to visit the magnificent aquarium. Then we flew on to the big island to look for the geese.

Dr William Elder, an old friend, was spending a year in Hawaii

A lava field of a-a on the slopes of Mauna Loa. A shower crosses the low country to the east

to make a survey of the Ne-ne, and so it was he and his wife who took us up the lava slopes of the now extinct volcano Mauna Loa to look for them. We motored far up a road which climbed the lower slopes until it came to an end and we were up in the cloud. Bill Elder was to take us to see a nest which he had watched over earlier in the year. The eggs had hatched and the young had left the nest some time before, but it was obviously of great interest to us to see the type of site selected by the birds for nesting. Only on the previous day a family of Ne-ne, no doubt the owners of the nest, had been seen in this area by one of the Pohakuloa biologists, so we had high hopes of finding them again.

We walked across the slope of the mountain, crossing huge stretches of lava flow where the going was really bad. The worst kind of lava is called 'a-a' (pronounced Ah-Ah) which is jagged, brittle and prickly like huge clinkers. Our shoes were almost cut to pieces. The more liquid looking lava, like thick black frozen treacle, is called 'pahoihoi' and is much better to walk on, but there is much less of it. Then there are the 'kipukas', which are islands of vegetation spared by the more recent lava flows. These were grassy with quite large koa trees (once used for making Hawaiian war canoes) and it is in these kipukas that the Ne-ne seem chiefly to feed and breed.

We struggled across the a-a finding it difficult to walk and keep a look out at the same time, because it took all one's attention deciding where next to put one's foot. After an hour and a half we came to the kipuka where the old nest was and Bill showed it to us, tucked right under a fallen tree with the down and feathers still in it. There were two other old nest sites near by, probably belonging to the same pair in earlier years.

Near the kipuka we found some fresh droppings and decided to spread out and search for the birds. In the swirling mist it was difficult to see anything, though later it cleared and became

pleasantly sunny. But we were unlucky; although we walked for about two hours down the lava flow we saw no Ne-ne. We wondered if they had seen us, and felt sure they had; but they must be very hard to see against the background of lava, for apparently they stay quite motionless, hoping to avoid detection. It was disappointing, of course, but it had been a most interesting if exhausting day, and at least we should be able to imagine them against that formidable jagged landscape when we looked at our little flock at home.

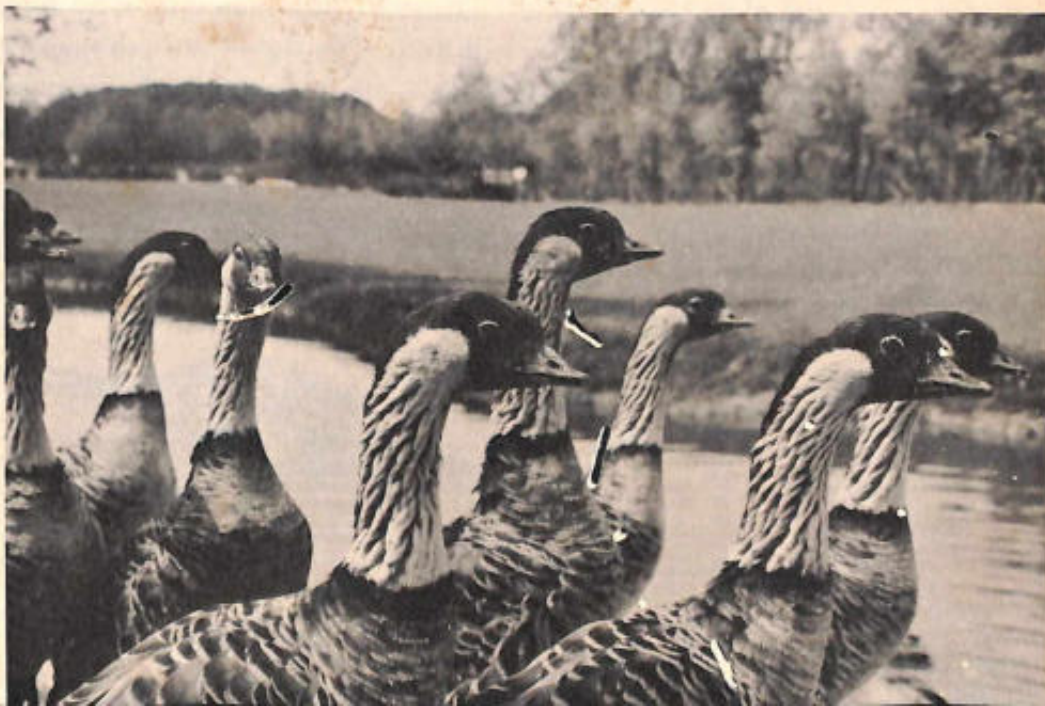
On another day we visited the rearing project at Pohakuloa and saw the young Ne-nes with Muscovy Ducks as foster parents, and the adult pairs in their covered enclosures.

They are now successfully rearing quite a number each year, and I hope that it may be possible soon to create a 'Ne-ne park' where young birds can be allowed to remain full-winged with their pinioned parents in a safely enclosed vermin-proof home, with the choice of freedom when they want it. In the meantime the Ne-ne has been adopted by Hawaii as its State bird, which should ensure a continuing interest in its welfare.

Over a hundred Ne-nes have now been reared at the Wildfowl

Dr William Elder shows me the traditional nesting-place of a pair of Ne-ne

Ne-ne



Trust from the original male and two females presented by Mr Shipman (who is really the fairy godfather of the Ne-ne) and they have been spread over some of the European zoos and private collections to safeguard their continued existence. The immediate threat of extinction seems to have been averted for the time being.

Some people think that it is not worth saving an animal if it can no longer maintain itself in its wild habitat, but I believe that it is the responsibility of the human race to save any species of animal (or plant come to that) from extinction by every possible means, for there is nothing more irrevocable than the extinction of a species. Keeping them in captivity may only be a 'holding operation' until such time as a more enlightened attitude prevails, as in due course it surely will.

Sooner or later, of this I am firmly convinced, Man will believe that it is important to preserve in all parts of the world islands of the environment in which he was evolved, the country which he shared for so long with the animals. Like the kipukas in Hawaii—the islands of vegetation in the deserts of lava—these national parks and nature reserves will be oases in the deserts of overpopulated civilization—oases at which man may refresh his spirit.

Oh yes! The penny will drop. The significance of man's relation to other animals will emerge again, nuclear physics, economics and astronautics notwithstanding.

New Guinea, Fiji, Hawaii