

wait till it sprouted and then pull it up by the roots. After I shot a few of them the others became so clever that they were the most difficult birds I ever tried to shoot. There was no getting near them, and when I would be out in the boat they could do all the business they required. And as for trapping them, they would not go near any sort of trap or net, so that their knowledge in that department must have been born with them. However, I got them down to about two, when I began to feed the wounded duck, and, of course, they soon found the food on the beach. Not only that, but went away and told a lot of their mates, or sent them a wireless message, for now there is a whole party of them, that never came here before at this time of year. They only came for the rata-honey, or for seeds that are all done now. If there is anything in the wireless vibrations that we hear so much about, the birds and many other creatures may have known all about it long ago, and that would explain many of our present mysteries. At all events, it seems that sparrows will soon gather in numbers wherever there is food—even out on Pigeon Island.

Previously when a party of them came they used to sit on the tree over the house and jabber there for half the day, but this lot of new arrivals are as shy as wild-geese, and keep on the far side of the little bay, yet I am hardly off the beach until they are dropping down on the duck's food. I would sooner have the rats.

Sparrows will never be checked by hard winters in this country, but may learn to live in this great extent of wooded mountains and go down on the crops like a plague. However, they have one weak point: they have not the slightest idea of hiding their nests, as so many other birds have. And even when they are building them they are always carrying straws like flags, and making such a parade that the whole community of other creatures knows where the nests are, and also when they are ready for robbing. Therefore the most likely check to be effective against the sparrows would be a nest-robber such as the long-tailed cuckoo. The latter, of course, are too few to be of much use. But if we wished to order a bird for the purpose, we would specify one that would be perfectly harmless otherwise, and that would come from some foreign country during the sparrows' breeding season, and then go home again. That just describes the cuckoo. And we should have more respect for them, and never shoot one of them under any circumstances, because more of them might learn to come if they had good times here.

We need not expect to get a check for the sparrows in a country where they flourish—as we did with the rabbits—but if there is any country with a mild climate where the sparrows do not flourish, it would be well worth while inquiring closely into the reason of it, with the hope of finding a harmless check for them. We shall not find it in the books, for they do not pay much attention to questions of that sort, but take endless pains with the definitions of species, their names, and classification. This may seem a trivial matter, but it was proposed the other day to import more game birds, which implied some wild grain for food, and if we succeeded in that the sparrows would gather and eat it, even out on those mountains. They are as mischievous for the sportsman as they are for the farmers, and will continue to be so for all time if we cannot rearrange matters.

FLIGHTLESS BIRDS OF NEW ZEALAND; AND OTHER NOTES.

By RICHARD HENRY, Caretaker of Resolution Island.

WOODHENS (*OCYDROMUS*).

WE have cleared most of the little peninsula on which our house stands, and now it is a favourite place for the woodhens; but they do not like each other's company, and there are seldom more than two to be seen at once, though there are half a dozen occasional visitors. They often treat us to some spirited races across the open, and are no mean runners when assisted by their wings, but all seem to be so well matched that they generally run dead-heats. If there happens to be one a little slow it is sure to be *minus* its tail, which is not of much account anyway; yet they seem to think a great deal of it, for the pulling of a feather is sure to bring on a fight, very fierce at first, but quickly dying away into threatening attitudes and various grunts which may represent bad language. The championship appears to be awarded more for courage than muscle, because the smallest hen, when she was thinking of nesting, would hunt away all the others, both males and females, except her mate, with whom she was generally friendly, but not always so. Those were the only pair here mated throughout the winter, and the only pair that would sing in concert. The male is our pet, and we call him "Chicken."

Out of all the others we hardly heard a chirrup until about the 16th July, when several of the old widows became quite musical all at once, and vied with each other in calling the loudest and the fastest. Then, to our surprise, we heard by the lower note and slower tune of one that it was a male. This one came to our place in a most disreputable rig-out of half-moulted feathers, so I called it "Scrag." It was a weakly, poor thing, and one of the hens used to thrash it and hunt it away. That is why I thought it a widow, though it had the stronger beak and legs of a male. However, I gave it a few good dinners of boiled fish, and it soon plucked up courage and learned to know the rattle of the lid on the dog's pot, and would come up carefully for a share. The dog seemed to notice that they only took little bits, and he soon disregarded them, so that now when I spread out fish on a stone it is common to see a weka on one side and a dog on the other, and both quite contented.

With better times and a grand new coat Scrag actually captivated the hen that used to hunt him about so contemptuously—the old story, "The course of true love," &c. Then he started