

worried to death. This tenacity of hold is quite unexpected from the shape of the weka's beak, but I have played with them by trailing a little fish on the rod, and was surprised how they could hold on until I lifted them off the ground.

22nd November.—We went to Breaksea Sound, and camped in a beautiful place called Beach Harbour, two miles east of Acheron Passage. We soon had the Maori-hens for company, of course, and there were two grown-up chickens. They were all rather shy at first, but food soon opened the way to their friendship or gratitude. I threw an old fellow some crabs, which he evidently took note of at once, for he followed me along the beach, and, after a few lessons, when I turned over a stone and he saw the crabs running he would come up and catch them himself, and his example soon made the others tame. Then I opened cockles for him with my knife, and he would stand at my knee and eat them with more confidence than the Maori-hen I had reared. But the reason I mention him at all is because he gave us an exhibition of his skill as a fisherman. Often I saw them wading in shallow water, but thought the fish too lively for them to catch. However, this one brought up several little fish as long as my finger, and paraded them about, calling his chickens to come for them. His neck and legs appeared to be rather long, as if to suit that sort of work, and I saw him peeping cautiously round corners as if expecting shy game, so that he must have been an old hand at it; and probably his forefathers were fishermen, because the circumstances were suitable.

With the isolation which these birds seem to crave, and indefinite time, it would not be hard to imagine the origin of a race of waders. In fact, the weka appears to be just the sort of bird to start with, because it will eat anything, and the little chickens are very hardy, with apparently a surplus of digestive power, which latter may be nearer the spirit of life than the old people used to think.

If a tribe of wekas had abundance of any one sort of food, either fish or fruit, I think they would be content with that, and become adapted for obtaining it; and with such material the simple laws we recently heard of could develop a variety of forms in accordance with the great variety of conditions, and the wonder is there are so few to fill them.

In Australia I knew the rails that came there in the spring, when the corn was knee-high. They made their nests in clover bottoms, and I often found their eggs, which were just like the weka's, but much smaller, of course. The chickens were also quite black like the weka's, and the parents made the same sort of croaking noise when I went near their nest, but I do not remember their ordinary cry. They could fly well, but did so unwillingly when alarmed, as if they preferred the long grass for refuge; but a dog would make them fly, and then their style was like that of the swamp-hen. They were distinctly migratory, but I never heard where they came from, nor could I imagine any suitable place for them in Australia during the dry season, because they seemed to like damp places. Then, if ever they came to New Zealand, it is no wonder they thought it a paradise, and, deciding to remain for ever, gave up flying. And the wekas have still a trace of their old migratory habits, because they will risk their lives like the rats, and swim for miles to get away out on some lonely island, far from their old homes and their persecuting neighbours. And perhaps these two, with their colonising impulse and great digestive power, may represent advanced germs of the fauna of many lands.

HABITS.

All young wekas are wanderers and trespassers for perhaps a year after they are turned away from home, and during this time they are hunted and chased by every old weka that sees them, but especially by their own fathers and mothers. Fortunately the youngsters are generally the best runners, so that they can get out of danger, but they are severely tested to prove their ability to obtain and defend a home before they are allowed to settle down and get married. There appears to be no fighting for wives, as is the case with most other creatures. Females seem to be plentiful, and fight among themselves; and the fight between the males is distinctly for the exclusive right to their feeding-grounds.

We have six or seven years' experience of them now, and those living near the house are tamer than ordinary fowls. One pair has been with us for five years, and during that time I never saw them 10 yards outside their boundary. The domains of two other pairs meet on a grass plot near the house, and on rare occasions the whole six of them may be seen within a few yards of each other, all on their own ground, and respecting each others' rights to some degree.

If the female dies or is taken by a hawk the male soon takes another mate, but if the male dies the place is taken by another male and his mate. They take nearly a month to hatch, and for some time previously are very busy about the nest, so that it may be forty days before they bring the weakly little chickens to the beach; and all this time they are going backwards and forwards on the ground till they have a regular beaten track that I can easily follow if I want their eggs. I have heard that weasels and ferrets are famous trackers, and that either of them could find a weka's nest.

When I go to take the eggs the hatcher, let it be either male or female, will not come off the nest, and will resist being pulled off with all its might. It will peck at my hand, but never severe enough to break the skin, so that it would not hurt a tough-skinned weasel very much. I have also heard that a weasel has courage enough to attack a man. Wekas sleep in a warm place on the ground every night, and the ferret is a night hunter. I mention this because even the most intelligent of our people attribute the destruction of the wekas to the poisoned grain laid for rabbits, and this after the wholesale importation of ferrets, weasels, and stoats.

NUMBER OF WEKA CHICKENS.

Three young ones are the most I have seen in one family in Dusky Sound, but I got four eggs in a nest at Lake Te Anau, where wekas were very plentiful before the ferrets came,