

migrate; but now, no matter where they go, the worm-diggers are there before them. The latter are more plentiful here now than the natives.

"There were no berries here late in the last autumn, though it is usual for several of them to last all through the winter. The same thing happened about four years ago, and I wrote about the native birds coming to my door for insipid berries that nothing had touched for years and eating up everything. They came this year in the same way; even the pigeons came right to the door and ate those berries, many of them before they were ripe, so that they must have been very hungry too.

"The blackbirds and thrushes never show themselves here while there is a berry of any sort in the bush; they are so shy. And when they are forced to come we may be sure there is nothing left for the natives. There are a few starlings about lately, and I am beginning to think that they must eat the honey too, for I do not know what else they are doing here.

"The panax has a cup for holding the honey, like the rata. So have the Australian gums, and they are all evidently adapted to be fertilised by birds. Perhaps that is why those supposed insect-eaters have taken to the honey. The starlings eat the grapes in Australia, and they are sweet, and it is as great a departure from their home fare of insects as it would be for them to eat the honey here. They may eat the honey in Australia too, but it has not been noticed, because so unexpected. It was supposed that a brush on the tongue is necessary for getting the honey out of those cups, but I do not think that a sparrow has any brush on his tongue, and yet he can go over a bunch of flowers as smartly as any native. It may be the same with blackbirds, thrushes, starlings, and several other of our importations, and if that is the case it is quite sufficient to starve out the natives in times of scarcity, because we may be sure that the native population of birds was fully up to the food-supply before we brought the strangers. The latter are more resourceful, and, of course, it is for the 'fittest' to survive and for the more lovable and friendly to disappear. A few winters ago I found a dead kakapo, quite fresh and without a mark on it, but light as a bunch of feathers. I did not pay much attention to it then, but now when I am on the subject I think it may have been a specimen of starvation by imported birds, and am greatly afraid it will be the fate of all the kakapos, notwithstanding their wonderful faculty for foretelling the seasons and for moving about to meet the changing conditions. Some seasons there may be plenty of berries in one place and few in another, and next season it may be the reverse. Yet the most of the kakapos would be in the best places for berries, though they had to walk to them, while the new berry-eaters can fly and gather up to take the best of everything. At Te Anau it was remarkable the great coats of fat the kakapos used to carry in May, especially the young ones. And here it was common to get heavy ones a few years ago, but it is not so now. The four I caught in last March were as poor as crows, and when they started a hard winter in that condition they would hardly get through it. The four I have in my store now are light and weak (in October). Their former store of food in their fat was becoming for their unreliable seasons, and their failure to breed every year was evidently to meet the same conditions.

"There are no signs of wood-hen chickens this year, though it is about two months late, so that they felt the pinch as well as the others."

Why the Game Birds disappear.

"The grey ducks hold their own, because they are night feeders and get a share of the gleanings to make up for what they lost in native seeds; but all the other seed-eaters that have not a little fat on them in the autumn will be starved out by the sparrows in the winter. Even if we had never brought out a weasel or laid a grain of poison the result would have been about the same under the sparrows, for they will not be kept in check by the winters as they were at Home.

"We had the suitable climate for all sorts of birds and the unlimited cover for all sorts of game, with its freedom from noxious things, and all that was wanted was the food in the thousands of pounds' worth of grain and seed scattered about every year. Imagine all the game birds we could have had instead of the sparrows. All the shooters in New Zealand, and all the tourists with them, could not have kept down the quail, and perhaps several others. They would have been the nuisance instead of the sparrows. What a mess was made of it—attained the exact opposite to what was desired—for want of setting a sufficient value on the habits of the commonest creatures. A speaker to the Wellington Acclimatisation Society the other day suggested 'a vigilant eye to the poacher,' as if he thought it was the poachers that destroyed the quails and pheasants. It is the sparrow that requires the vigilant eye on him. The most effective destroyer of other creatures is the one that removes their food. Without the food we may save ourselves the trouble of trying to establish any wild seed-eaters.

"On the 8th and 9th July I was in Fanny Bay, went hunting there, but there were no brown birds but wekas, which were very shy. I was unable to see any, only heard them. I think there are ferrets there, and that the wekas are learning to avoid them. The ferrets are few, and the wekas are swift and alert, because they are always hunting each other. That ground is all covered with deep moss, hollow and loose underneath, so that I would have no chance of catching any but a very foolish or blind ferret."

"September 6th.—Have just come home from a trip up Acheron Passage; was in Wet Jacket two nights waiting for a calm time to get shells for the captain. Kakapos are getting scarcer every year, no matter where I go in Dusky or Breaksea. This will be their breeding season, and I will hear them drumming in December. I will write separately about the scarcity of kakapo, for I think it is not all due to ferrets. I never come within hearing of the beach now without hearing the alarm-cries of the blackbirds and thrushes as they dive into the bush—when there are no berries. While there is a berry or honey they do not come on the beaches.

"Cascade Bush is full of wood-hens, by the way they have the moss all pulled about, and yet I did not see one of them in the bush, though when there were only a few we used to see every