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ASPECTS OF THE BIOLOGY OF THE LITTLE SHAG

(*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos brevirostris* VEILLOT 1817)

A thesis presented in partial
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PLATE 1: ADULT LITTLE SHAG

ABSTRACT

Aspects of the biology of the little shag (Phalacrocorax melanoleucos brevirostris Vieillot) were examined from December 1980 until April 1983 at Hamilton's and Sexton's Lagoons in lowland Manawatu.

Body measurements and plumage patterns of both sexes are taken from dried specimens. Although females tend to be smaller, the differences are not significant. Plumage patterns, based on the proportion of white, are listed, and possible reasons for plumage differences between New Zealand and Australia discussed.

Postures and behaviour patterns are documented, and related to ordinal and family members. The most distinctive postures and behaviour patterns relate to courtship and sexual activities.

Aspects of breeding ecology are recorded, and comparisons between New Zealand and Australian populations made from records of the respective nest record schemes. Fundamental differences occur, possibly due to the unpredictable fluctuations which seem to characterise the Australian freshwater environment.

Seasonal and daily time budgets are detailed at both lagoons. Rest and self-maintenance activities decrease during breeding, and tend to occur at dawn and evening. The variable relation of movement and reproductive activities is discussed in terms of season, phase of breeding, and time of day.

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