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Blackbird: pp 234-235.

Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula merula* Linnaeus 1758

1862 Nelson
Self-introduced 1920 Norfolk Island

Twenty-six birds were released in Nelson in 1862 (Thomson 1922). After further releases by all the other acclimatisation societies the Blackbird was established throughout New Zealand within ten years.

“The blackbird was another treasured reminder of the Old Country; and it is now another “feathered friend” that is heartily cursed up hill and down dale. There is some doubt as to when it was first introduced into New Zealand. Old settlers in Otago have an impression that it is indigenous, and was in the colony before civilisation came. It is probable, however, that early settlers in Otago mistook some of our own dark-plumaged birds for the English blackbird, and were led into a misapprehension. A statement has been made that the blackbird came up into Canterbury from Otago, making its first appearance in the former province in 1856. No Canterbury settler with whom I have spoken on the subject has been able to confirm that statement.

The first record in regard to Canterbury is in 1865, when Captain Rose brought a pair to Lyttelton in the “Mermaid”. In the same year the Otago Acclimatisation Society liberated a pair in Dunedin. In 1867 Captain Stevens brought forty-six to Lyttelton in the “Matoaka” and six more were liberated in Dunedin. Others followed, a few being acclimatised every year for a considerable time, Messrs. R. and C. Bills bringing out quite a large number. There was a great rage for blackbirds in Christchurch at one time. A single bird kept in a cage by Mr. T. H. Potts, at Governor’s Bay, in Lyttelton Harbour, was the subject of much attention, and extortionate prices were paid for a mate for an odd bird” (Drummond 1906).

It was self-introduced to Norfolk Island in 1939 according to McKean & Hindwood (1965), but in 1920 according to Christian (2005). Schodde et al. (1983) said that M. Buffet recalled seeing one or two birds in 1918-1920 near the Melanesian Mission Chapel, and thought it had been introduced by the Mission people.

