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Sulphur-crested cockatoo: pp 228-229.

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita* (Latham 1790)
1907 Turakina, Wanganui



Escaped birds became established from 1907 onwards in western North Island localities. Four escaped at Turakina in 1907, and rapidly became established (Martin & Bartlett 1963). Genuine vagrants may occur as well. A bird seen at South Kaipara Head, on 26 May 1959 by M. A. Waller must be a strong candidate for a genuine vagrant. It occurred during a period of strong westerly winds.

A flock of 22 birds was present at Fordell in April 1946. The birds had apparently been present for c. 30 years (i.e. since 1916). It was reported from Clevedon about March 1921 and in September 1942.

In New Zealand the species' largest colonies are in the watersheds of the Turakina and Rangitikei Rivers near Wanganui, where a population of about 400 birds was estimated in 1962, and also between the lower Waikato and Raglan Rivers where a flock of about 200 birds was seen in 1964. These were heavily persecuted for the live bird trade, and have now dispersed into much smaller flocks.

Banks Peninsula is also a centre. In winter 1985 cockatoos were reported from Little River, Hawarden, the road between Coalgate and Hororata, Loburn, and Amberley. Several flocks of up to 6 birds were reported. Mr Tim Rait of the Hornby Pet shop reported that some of the cockatoos seen on Banks Peninsula had included birds that had been sold then subsequently escaped. He says that one bird had escaped from White-wash Head Road, and another from Diamond Harbour. He also reported one escaping into Riccarton Bush, then being seen flying inland at Racecourse Hill.

“Before we all say ‘oh, that explains it then!’ I’d be interested in testing the veracity of this Mr Rait’s

claims?! Multiple birds escaping from all points of the compass at about the same time? Sounds a bit hard to believe. Sounds more likely that Mr Rait was perhaps conjuring up a justification for going out and ‘recapturing’ these very valuable birds?!” (Andrew Crossland July 2008 Birding-NZ email group).

It was recorded in 50 squares (2%). The population in New Zealand may be a mixture of escaped cage birds, ship-board releases and genuine wild birds that have come across the Tasman. Feather lice on New Zealand feral birds are of the same species as found on wild birds, which may indicate a wild origin. Stories circulate about multiple releases from ships, but one story about a 1980s release being responsible for the flocks in Taranaki north is clearly incorrect.