

PUZZLING DOTTERELS AT RUAKAKA, N. AUCKLAND.

By H. R. McKenzie, Clevedon.

A few miles south of Whangarei Harbour, Ruakaka is a typical east coast estuary of North Auckland. On 13 and 14/2/46, two strange dotterels were seen across the river and on a second visit on the 14th they were feeding on the outer sandbank. On three occasions they were watched with glasses at a few yards.

In general appearance, carriage and stance they were like the red-breasted dotterel (*Pluviorhynchus obscurus*) but smaller, though a little larger and more solid than the banded dotterel (*Charadrius bicinctus*). Careful notes were made of their colour; back, brown as in banded dotterel; head darker than in either banded or red-breasted dotterel; light band on the throat and a dark shoulder to shoulder band, very definite; a dark grey wash extended downwards from the band to the lower breast, not broken, but just a little lighter below the upper band; no definite eye stripe. One bird was a little more coloured than the other. The whole appearance gave the impression of new colouring, not fading colour as in two banded dotterels seen above the bridge. No distinctive leg-colour was noted, but the legs were not bowed outwards at the upper joint as in a banded dotterel. There was nothing unusual about the bill, which was short and stout. The body was rounded, not flattened like a banded dotterel's. The manner of feeding was as described for *Charadrius mongolus* in *The Emu*, January, 1945; vol xlv, p.209. Generally they were more erect than banded dotterels.

On the first two visits they were in the midst of a loose flock of red-breasted dotterels, resting at high-tide. They kept fairly close together but not closer to each other than they were to the red-breasted dotterels. On the third visit they were feeding some yards apart from each other and about the same distance from the red-breasted dotterels. On visits on February 15, 16, 21 and 22 they were missing.

No banded dotterels were at any time seen with or near the red-breasted dotterels. On the sand-flat above the footbridge two banded dotterels in typical fading plumage were seen at low tide on February 14, 15 and 16.

The two puzzling birds seen on February 13 and 14 were certainly not *Charadrius bicinctus*. The question is whether they were *Charadrius mongolus*, a bird not hitherto recorded for New Zealand, although it occurs annually in some numbers in south-east Australia; and another closely-related Asiatic dotterel, the large-billed *Charadrius leschenaulti*, has twice been reported in recent years from Manukau Harbour. (v. *The Emu*, Jan. 1946, p 223, and July, 1946, p 76).

(Mr. McKenzie's observations draw attention to the possibilities of additional species of the wader family being recorded from New Zealand and members interested in these birds are urged to closely examine any shore birds seen by them and to take down on the spot as complete a description of the birds as possible.—Ed.)

LATE NESTING OF SKYLARK (*Alauda arvensis*).—Berwick, Otago, 2/1/46, nest with four young hatched that day. Purakanui, Otago, 18/1/46, nest, 3 eggs.—Mrs. I. Tily, Dunedin.