

BREEDING OF RED-CAPPED DOTTEREL IN NEW ZEALAND.

By R. A. Falla, Wellington.

On August 5, 1947, Mr. L. A. Shand, of Christchurch, reported the early nesting on the gravel bed of the Ashley River of what he took to be a banded dotterel (*Charadrius bicinctus*). His interest was aroused not only by the early date but by the absence of any banded markings on the sitting bird. Before I had an opportunity of examining the nest with him it was washed away, with its two eggs, by a three-foot rise in the stream.

A few weeks later, however, the bird was found by Mr. Shand to be sitting on a further two eggs higher up on the same shingle island. The bird had been sitting for something over two weeks, when on September 10 in company with Mr. Shand, Miss N. Corne and Mr. J. R. Eyles, I was able to visit the site and examine the bird at very short range. As far as can be asserted without examining the bird in the hand and comparing it with Australian specimens it appeared to be a female red-capped dotterel (*Leucopoliis ruficapillus*). The plumage was entirely pale grey on the upper surface with faint lighter flecks, the only dark marking at all conspicuous being a patch on either side of the breast just above the bend of the wing. Chestnut markings were faint on the front of the crown and behind the ear. Legs and feet were black. In flight the narrow white bar on the wing was visible, and the white outer tail feathers on either side. Call note heard was a faint "wit-wit-wit," and when the bird left the nest she gave a "distraction display" by crouching close to the ground and flicking the half-opened wings. There were two eggs in the nest of buff ochre ground colour, with irregular streaks and blotches of brown, measuring 30 by 23 millimetres, and 29 by 22 millimetres. Time available for observation on this date was short but there was no sign in two hours of any mate in the vicinity, although banded dotterel in pairs and skirmishing parties were numerous. The eggs, even when the bird had been just flushed, appeared to be stone cold, and it seemed likely that they were not in process of incubation. After the lapse of more than the normal period of incubation and in view of the threat of floods (which later swept the area clean) the two eggs were taken and examined. One was infertile and in the other an embryo had formed and died. In appearance they resembled Australian eggs of *ruficapillus*.

Although it seems likely that this little plover is a representative of the Australian form the possibility is by no means ruled out of its being one of the many Northern Hemisphere representatives of the widely distributed species *L. alexandrius*. However, as excellent photographs* were subsequently obtained by Mr. K. Bigwood there seems little doubt about the identification. It is also of considerable interest to record that during the visit of Messrs. Bigwood and Shand the eggs were brooded and sat upon at intervals by a banded dotterel (*C. bicinctus*) reported to be a male.

After the flood mentioned above the red-capped dotterel was not again seen.

* The Society is indebted to Mr. Bigwood for the donation of an excellent photograph of this bird, a reproduction of which appears in this issue.—Ed.



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RED-CAPPED DOTTEREL SITTING ON NEST, ASHLEY RIVERBED, CANTERBURY.