

CHARADRIUS LESCHENAUTI AT MIRANDA.

By R. B. Sibson.

A single specimen of Geoffroy's sandplover (*Charadrius leschenaulti*) also known as the large sand dotterel spent some months of the summer at Miranda on the western side of the Firth of Thames.

It was first seen and identified by Messrs. H. R. McKenzie and O. Cheesman and the writer on 20/12/47. The credit for spotting it as a dotterel with a difference goes to H.R.McK., who found it on a strip of shelly beach where some pairs of banded dotterels (*C. bicinctus*) were still nesting while others were already flocking. Among juvenile and moulting banded dotterels it showed up as a leggy upstanding dotterel, greyish above, with a conspicuously white forehead, a faint wash on either side of its chest, a markedly heavy beak and a large eye which was surrounded by black and so may have appeared larger than it actually is. On the ground it seemed about as big in body as a male banded dotterel, but its larger size was evident when it was seen in flight among banded dotterels. Its manner of flight, also, was distinctive. Its wings looked broader than those of a banded dotterel, its wing beat slower, at least over a short distance, and its flight more buoyant. The colour of the legs was grey-green. It was heard once to utter a distinctive call, the clarity of which unfortunately, was blurred by the notes of the banded dotterels with which it was flying. As the falling tide exposed the mud, it was feeding with a scattered flock of banded dotterels and wrybills (*Anarhynchus frontalis*).

It was next seen by H.R.McK. and the writer on 24/1/48. At full tide it had joined some wrybills which were squatting on the sun-baked mud of a dried-out tidal lagoon. At a distance among the wrybills it could easily have been overlooked, but when it stood up and moved its general outline and the way in which it carried itself, focussed attention on it at once. Some hours later when the tide was well down, it and an American pectoral sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*) were feeding within a yard of each other on the soft ooze of a tidal runnel. It was seen once to peck at the pectoral sandpiper and to drive it a short distance.

On 7/2/48, Messrs. O. Cheesman and E. G. Turbott and the writer found it again in the same place. Full-tide had brought together what must be a unique assemblage of small waders; for with about 120 wrybills and 30 banded dotterels were five curlew sandpipers (*Calidris testacea*), one American pectoral sandpiper, one red-necked stint (*Calidris minuta ruficollis*), and the large sand dotterel, which preferred the company of its nearest-of-kin, the banded dotterels. It was last seen by Mr. O. Cheesman on February 15th, but it could not be found on February 28th, nor on two subsequent visits.

In recent years this dotterel from Central Asia has twice appeared in Manukau Harbour, near Auckland; and these occurrences have already been recorded in "The Emu" (vol. 45, p. 223; and vol. 46, p. 76). The first bird was seen on May 20 and September 5 in 1943, near Puketutu; the second on September 30 and October 10, in 1945, at Puhinui. It is a dotterel with an immense winter range which extends from south-east Africa to the Solomons, and it has also been recorded from Lord Howe Island. The three recorded occurrences of recent years may indicate that more often than is suspected some individuals overshoot the mark, i.e., the Solomons, in their southward dispersion and reach the northern regions of New Zealand. Flocks of banded dotterels and wrybills are always worth close examination to see if any strangers have joined them.

So far no museum has a specimen of *Charadrius leschenaulti* taken in New Zealand, but a specimen from Ceylon, now in the Auckland Museum, has proved most useful in confirming the identification. It should perhaps be added that all who saw the Miranda specimen used telescopes and carried out their observations at the distance of a chain or less, and for such length of time as they required to take in all diagnostic details of the bird.