

## WHIMBREL AT CLEVEDON.

By H. R. McKenzie, Clevedon.

The first whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus variegatus*) to be recorded in the Clevedon district was seen on 6/4/47. It was resting on a tide-flat at Mataitai with a party of wintering godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) and was seen from the road with the aid of binoculars at about 200 yards. The light was failing so nothing could be done that day. On 8/4/47, Miss M. J. McCallum and the writer tried to get a closer view with the rising tide. The darkness came too soon and only distant views by telescope were obtained. Its shape, stance and curved bill were noted. On 12/4/47, Messrs. V. I. Clark, F. Murray and the writer crept into a position in long grass on a tiny tide-flat island 45 yards from the whimbrel. With telescopes it could easily be seen to blink its eye. One of the party took down notes while the other two, using his prostrate form as a rest for their telescopes, worked from the tip of the bill to the end of the tail, discussing each marking and feature. The minute detail thus obtained agreed perfectly with Oliver's description in "New Zealand Birds."

While this procedure was taking place the whimbrel and 23 godwit with it could see us plainly but showed no fear. Also we talked in tones easily heard at 45 yards, but were subsequently informed that they probably could not hear us at all as our voices would be pitched too low for them. To put them to flight it was only necessary for one of the party to stand upright. The writer had been warned by Mr. R. B. Sibson to look for the light blaze up the lower back, visible only in flight, or in hand, because this species is hard to separate from the American *Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*, which has a darker back.

Having made the bird fly we could easily see the light rump, even without the use of glasses. This left no doubt of its identity. Another close inspection was made on 19/4/47 at the same spot, by Miss M. J. McCallum, Mr. O. Cheesman and the writer. Messrs. J. W. and R. B. St. Paul and party saw it more distantly on 27/4/47.

On none of the above-mentioned occasions had this bird made any call, but on 4/5/47 Miss M. J. McCallum saw it flying along the beach as if looking for its companions, and it called repeatedly. The sweetly rippling call cannot be mistaken and has earned for the whimbrel in Britain the name of "seven-whistler."

The godwits with which the bird associated were wintering ones which had failed to leave in the autumn with the breeding birds. Each year about seventy are left at Mataitai, but by the end of June they have all disappeared, presumably having gone to the Manukau. It was therefore not surprising that the whimbrel was not seen at Mataitai after 4/5/47, as the godwits had then nearly all gone. Nor was it surprising when Mr. D. A. Urquhart reported a whimbrel at Karaka and identified it as the same sub-species. This was exactly opposite Clevedon and only twenty miles away. It is very probable that it was the same bird and that it had gone over there with some of the last of the Mataitai godwits. It was, of course, evident by this time that it was spending the winter in New Zealand.

From recent reports (R. B. Sibson, "Bulletin of the O.S.N.Z." No. 2, 1941-42) and (E. G. Turbott, R. B. Sibson and R. H. D. Stidolph, "N.Z. Bird Notes," Vol. 2, No. 3) it is evident that whimbrels must come to this country nearly every year. To assist observers to find it among the godwits I would suggest attention to the following points:—(a) The long down-curved bill; (b) the pretty trilling call, made most often when the bird is put up; (c) the darker colouring; (d) frequent pursuit of it, usually by one godwit, when the flock is in the air. This action alone is worth watching for, as it could easily led to the discovery of a whimbrel.

The thanks of the writer are due to Mr. E. G. Turbott, ornithologist at the Auckland War Memorial Museum, for help with specimens for comparison, and to Mr. D. A. Urquhart, of Karaka, for his co-operation and for guiding a large party of observers on 2/6/47 to the Karaka haunt of the whimbrel.