

MIGRATORY WADERS IN WELLINGTON PROVINCE.

By R. H. D. Stidolph, Masterton.

Increasing attention has been paid in recent years by field-workers to the occurrence of migratory waders in New Zealand and the fruits of this work have been seen in the rich finds of Auckland district members of the society. Little has been recorded in past years of the presence of birds of this group in the Wellington district.

In the first place it is necessary to state that the areas attractive to waders in the Wellington province are extremely limited in size and confined to three or four river-mouths on the west coast of the province. There are no extensive tidal harbours such as the Auckland district possesses. Moreover, the east coast, insofar as it relates to the Wellington province is a most unattractive length of coast-line for waders, the rivers of small volume usually flowing into the sea between hills and with no estuary worthy of the name on the whole coast.

It is apparent, however, that the west coast of the Wellington district lies on at least a subsidiary southward migration route, as I have seen waders in small parties travelling southward in the late spring but my limited visits to this coast have not provided any evidence of big scale migratory movements, though these would possibly be forthcoming if a more intense watch were kept.

I have no records at all of migratory Northern Hemisphere waders on the east coast of the Wellington province, after having paid visits to all the river-mouths of this length of coast-line. Even in the Palliser Bay area, at the southern extremity of the district, records are extremely meagre, due, I take it, to the non-existence of tidal mudflats in Lake Onoke. The only migratory wader recorded here is the godwit (*Limosa lapponica*). On December 2, 1937, when Onoke Lake was at an exceptionally low level, a party of ten godwits was seen, while on April 6, 1941, two were recorded. Incidentally, a solitary wrybill (*Anarhynchus frontalis*) was seen on Onoke Spit on November 1, 1942, my only record for this particular area.

The north-eastern side of Wairarapa Lake, at a point about 20 miles inland from Palliser Bay, has a considerable area of shallow water and sand flats, especially in the early part of the year, when the lake is usually at a low level. Here I have seen a knot (*Calidris canutus*) on February 4, 1945, and one or two wrybill (one on February 4, 1945, and two on February 1 and 8, 1948). These are of interest in providing rare inland records of these birds in the North Island. Another inland record much nearer to Masterton and over 30 miles from the east coast is that of an American pectoral sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*) and a Siberian pectoral sandpiper (*C. acuminata*) on the sewage farm associated with the Waingawa Freezing Works, on December 14, 1946. The birds were keeping company under conditions that gave an admirable opportunity to write down on the spot the differences in plumage between the two birds, which were under close observation by J. M. Cunningham and myself for half-an-hour. They were still there the next day when they were watched by my wife and myself for some time.

These birds were found close to a party of stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*). One was feeding in the sludge. Later the second bird started to feed, both probing into it with quick movements, sometimes plunging the bill right home and even the head sometimes to just beyond the eye. They waded in the sludge up to their breasts. On the second day, my wife saw one lie on its side in the sludge.

The sharp-tailed sandpiper (*acuminata*) I have seen also in the Manawatu. The first record is of a party of ten feeding on the side of a road at Foxton Beach on a wet day, November 10, 1943. These birds were comparatively tame and were approached closely as they fed.

eagerly. They eventually took flight, circled as they gained height and swung away to the south-west, evidently in continuation of their migratory flight. Again, three birds of this species were seen at the Ohau River mouth on January 5, 1947. They were reposing among driftwood near the river.

At the Ohau I have seen golden plover (*Pluvialis dominica*), turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*), knot, whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) and wrybill. Four golden plover were seen there on November 17 and 21, 1943. These birds may have summered there, as K. A. Wodzicki saw three there on March 12, 1944. This plover I have seen more recently at the Waitotara River mouth—two on November 10, 1948 and three flying the following morning.

The turnstone has been seen on three occasions at the Ohau, two on November 17, 1943 and three on November 21. These birds were feeding diligently, turning over small stones on the beach. On November 18, 1945, three turnstones were seen flying south. They alighted and fed for about 15 minutes in an area of wet sand frequented by banded dotterel (*Charadrius bicinctus*). They then flew off in continuation of their southward movement.

The occurrence of the whimbrel on November 17, 1945, has been recorded already. (See N.Z. Bird Notes Vol. 2, p. 35.) Most visits to the Ohau have revealed the presence of an odd wrybill in the last three months of the year, as the following records show: November 11 and 17, 1945, one; November 18, 1945, three; December 25, 1946, one; October 22, 1947, four; November 4 and 16, 1948, one.

The knot I have seen not only at the Ohau (November 11, 1945, two; October 22 and 26, 1947, one) but also at the Manawatu River mouth (November 20, 1943, one; November 14, 1945, four; October 25, 1947, eight) and the Rangitikei River mouth (November 12, 1948, ten) usually in company with godwits, which occur at several of the west coast river estuaries from Waitotara southwards, including the Waitotara, Rangitikei, Manawatu, Ohau and Waikanae. Many spend the summer at the Rangitikei and Manawatu estuaries. The godwit has been recorded also in past years on odd occasions at the mouth of the Hutt River, in Wellington Harbour. The largest counts I have are 103 at the Manawatu on November 20, 1943, 107 at the Rangitikei on November 12, 1948, and 21 at the Ohau on November 4, 1948.

The Waikanae Estuary was the subject of a paper by Wodzicki in the Emu, Vol. 46, pp. 3-43, July, 1946, in which there are records of the occurrence there of the turnstone, knot, red-necked stint (*Pisobia ruficollis*), sanderling (*Crocethia alba*) and godwit.

Buller records that several specimens of the golden plover had been taken on the Wellington coast and also that it had been seen at the Rangitikei beach. As far as I am aware, there are no previous records of the occurrence of either the pectoral or short-tailed sandpiper in the Wellington province.

Several species of migratory waders have been recorded in recent years at the Waitotara Estuary by W. P. Mead in the classified notes section of this publication. These include the golden plover, turnstone and knot, besides the wrybill. An odd knot and wrybill have been recorded also in recent years at the Wanganui river-mouth.

As this article is concerned principally with the occurrence of the Northern Hemisphere waders, the references to the wrybill are more or less incidental. It should be added that the oyster-catcher (*Haematopus spp.*), banded dotterel and stilt occur on both the east and west coasts in suitable localities, all three breeding in the district.