

1949, Mrs. R. H. D. Stidolph watched a young shining cuckoo investigate a deserted and damaged sparrow's nest, which it entered. The bird snuggled down in the nest and was fed there by a warbler. One can easily imagine how an inexperienced observer would readily assume, quite wrongly, that this cuckoo was being reared in a sparrow's nest. In such a manner has the legend of the relationship between the long-tailed cuckoo and grey warbler arisen. Buller himself said that the illustration by Keulemans of a young long-tailed cuckoo being fed by a warbler had the appearance of an exaggeration, and I believe he was misled by similar reports to those quoted above. In addition Keulemans had himself seen a species of young cuckoo fed by a variety of birds in West Africa, and would be only too ready to believe that such would take place with our cuckoos. It is well-known that young shining cuckoos (and probably young long-tailed cuckoos also) are often surrounded by excited birds of many species, and the close approach of one may give the impression of feeding. It must be admitted, of course, that on odd occasions a morsel of food might be offered without this necessarily becoming an habitual occurrence. Even if satisfactory proof were offering that such occasions were numerous that is no justification for assuming that the bird fed had actually been reared by the warbler.

SUMMARY.

(1) The egg of the long-tailed cuckoo (*Eudynamis taitensis*) is as described by Fulton and in more detail by Stead, and shows little variation in size or colouring in nests of various species.

(2) There is no reliable evidence to show that the egg is ever laid in the nest of the grey warbler (*Pseudogerygone igata*).

(3) Suggestions that this cuckoo is fed either regularly or fortuitously by the warbler are probably based on cases of mistaken identity for the shining or bronze cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*).

A WANDERING TATTLER.

By H. R. McKenzie, Clevedon.

At Kawa Kawa Bay, Clevedon, a wandering tattler has been present from mid-August, 1948, up to the present, July, 1949. It is undoubtedly *Heteroscelus incanus incanus*, and is the third recorded occurrence in the New Zealand area. Oliver, in "New Zealand Birds," states that two were shot on Portland Island, Hawke's Bay, in 1883, and one was shot at Sunday Island in the Kermadec group, in 1913. There is no record of the grey-tailed tattler, *H. i. brevipes*, having been known in this country though it is fairly common in North Australia.

The bird was first noticed as an unusual shore bird in mid-August, 1948, by Mr. W. Pratt, a resident, who told me of it when we met at Clevedon two weeks later. Petrol was scarce, the distance was eleven miles, and I did not expect that it would have stayed; so I did not go to look for it. On November 8, I saw Mr. Pratt again, and he told me that the bird was still there. He gave an excellent description of its appearance and its call. I lost no further time, went to the Bay the next day, November 9, and saw the bird quite closely with a good telescope. I did not know it, so got in touch by telephone with Mr. E. G. Turbott, ornithologist at the War Memorial Museum, at Auckland. Mr. Turbott suggested from my description, that it should be a tattler. Book references soon proved that he was correct. From this time it has been seen frequently by many observers. Since May, 1949, however, it has not been seen so regularly, having evidently found another spot where it spends part of its time. Mr. W. P. Mead, of Castlecliff, Wanganui, on November 30, obtained good photographs, using a telephoto lens.

It was, of course, necessary at the outset to determine whether the bird was a wandering tattler (*H. i. incanum*) or a grey-tailed tattler (*H. i. brevipes*). Mr. H. S. Munro, of Papakura, lent me a skin of *H. i. incanum* from a collection owned by him jointly with his brother, Mr. Geo. C. Munro, of Honolulu, who had collected this skin on 20/1/94 in Hawaii. The skin and the bird appeared to match. Each was in winter plumage, dark grey on the upper surface, a little less dark on the upper front and the sides of the breast, grey to white underneath with regular patches of broad indefinite darker bars towards the under tail. There was no fine barring except a little on the upper flanks. The legs were yellow and the bill dark brown. The skin specimen showed some fine white barring on the under side and outer edge of the angle of the wing. This could not be detected on the living bird. Mayr, in "Birds of the South-west Pacific," gives a good illustration of a flying bird showing the all-dark upper surface, unbroken from head to tail. Munro, in "Birds of Hawaii," states that the colour of the upper parts does not change throughout the year. His illustration of a bird in summer plumage is rather too light. Cayley, in "What Bird is That?" shows the winter (our summer) plumage but it does not show the correct colour of the legs, underparts and head. The stance is not good according to what I have seen. Allen, in "The Shore Birds, Cranes and Rails," the "National Geographic Magazine," Aug., 1937, vol. lxxii, No. 2, illustrates a bird in breeding plumage. The colour, marking, stance and shape of bill are excellent. Indeed, the picture is most life-like. Serventy, in an article, "Notes on Some Rarer Waders," the Emu, vol. xliii, April, 1944, makes a special comparison of the groove on the upper mandible, showing by illustration how it runs along two-thirds of the bill in *H. i. incanum*, and half of the bill in *H. i. brevipes*. Here was the means of proving the sub-species more definitely than it could be done by colour, in which respect there is so little difference.

Three Clevedon members, F. Murray, L. H. Munro and W. W. Renouf, cleared up the matter of the groove on the bill on 5/12/48. By excellent stalking they crept to 15 yards distance from the standing bird, where they rested a telescope on a fence and had ample leisure to examine the bill. All agreed that the groove, which was plainly visible, ran two-thirds of the way towards the tip of the upper mandible. I was directing operations but had not told them how far the groove should go in either species, so the result was very satisfactory. I was able to confirm it on 9/12/48 when I clearly saw the groove myself. This left no doubt as to its being a wandering tattler.

The haunt of the tattler at Clevedon is a rocky point in the centre of a wide shallow bay. It sometimes feeds on the sandy mud but more often among the rounded dark-grey stones of some ridged shingle spits at the point and a round shingle bed close by. Among these stones it is practically invisible at twenty yards when it is not moving. Geo. C. Munro describes its habitat in the Hawaiian group: "A winter visitant to Hawaii, according to Henshaw, it straggles in, probably accompanying flights of plover. It frequents rocky shores of all islands of the group, generally singly or in pairs, but occasionally small flocks are seen. It has a fairly wide distribution over the Pacific in the winter. In Hawaii it frequents rocky shores and rocky beds of streams even into the mountains. It is almost never seen on sandy beaches, but frequents inshore lagoons. Henshaw records seeing them feeding on grassland. It rises when disturbed with a quick flight and cheery whistle and flies along the shore to another station. Its food is principally crabs, molluscs and other denizens of rocky shores." Bull, "Field Notes on Waders in the South-west Pacific with Special Reference to the Russell Islands," The Emu, vol. 47, January, 1948, found tattlers frequenting mangrove swamps, salty stagnant pools, open beach and reef, all of which were in close proximity, so that the birds apparently moved from one to another. Those which were collected were all *H. i. brevipes*, but *H. i. incanum* has also been collected in the Russell Islands. Hindwood, "Birds of Lord

Howe Island," states that *H. i. incanus* has been found once and *H. i. brevipes* twice on Lord Howe Island.

This little bird of eleven inches has a quick, graceful flight. Most of the writers quoted mention this, but Witherby, "The Handbook of British Birds," mentions also the intermittent strokes of the down-curved wings. This is very noticeable. Witherby also gives an important point for identification in mentioning the tip-up motion of the after part of the body. This occurs whenever the bird is moving and sometimes when it is standing.

The only call heard here has been a sweet clear whistle of four even notes closely run together, uttered almost every time it rises. Geo. C. Munro states that the Hawaiian name is ulili. The ulili was a bamboo flute or whistle and the bird's cheery silvery call may have caused it to be named after the instrument. Witherby describes the call of *H. i. brevipes* as an irregular screech not of the same intensity or pitch.

The association with other birds, or lack of association mostly, is interesting. It was alone when seen the first time and also the next, but on 25/11/48 Mr. R. B. Sibson found it in close association with a whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus variegatus*) which had not been seen there before. The two birds not only fed near each other but kept together in flight. This continued until 20/2/49 when a second whimbrel arrived. The two larger birds then left the little one by itself. They left the bay soon after this, but the tattler stayed on alone. Stilts are usually present and sometimes godwit, but it does not keep close to these. Its friendship with the first whimbrel was so close that on a day of strong cold wind the tattler was seen sheltering close in the lee of the larger bird.

Oliver states that the first nest was found in 1912 by Sir F. Lambert, near the Alaska-Canadian boundary, 25 miles south of the Arctic Ocean, and that eggs hatched on July 9. The four eggs were in a nest in gravel. He also records the finding by Dr. Olaus J. Murie of a nest on a gravel bar on the Savage River in Alaska, on July 1, 1924 (this should be July 1, 1923) at 4,000 feet. The four eggs were collected for scientific purposes. Arthur A. Allen describes the finding of the nest by Olaus J. Murie, and gives the correct date, July 1, 1923. Matthews, "Birds of Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands and the Australasian South Polar Quadrant, with Additions to 'The Birds of Australia,'" p.p. 119-121, quotes an account by Olaus J. Murie in the Auk, vol. xli, No. 2, April, 1924, p.p. 231-235, pls. xvi-xviii. of the finding of several birds on the beds of rivers in the Alaska Range in 1922 and 1923. A downy chick and its male parent were collected in 1922. The following year the nest was found and several young of other broods observed. Dr. Olaus J. Murie attended the Science Congress at Auckland in February, 1949, and it was a great pleasure to show him this bird, whose kind he had seen at the opposite end of its range. He was very pleased and was keenly interested in the fact that it had over-stayed the migration time.

The appearance of this bird in mid-August, 1948, is puzzling. The date seems too early for migration from Alaska or eastern Asia. It is my opinion that it had stayed over from the spring (our spring) of 1947. It could have been here without being detected, or may have been at another part of the coast. Its staying over in 1948 seems the more likely since it did not depart in the autumn of 1949 and is still present in July in splendid breeding plumage. On February 20, 1949, it was seen to be a little darker on the breast and flanks, but had no lines. On March 3 it was in practically full colour. The finely pencilled wavy lines on its whole front, flanks and underparts, except a little of the after belly, give it a striking appearance. Probably the lack of numbers of its kind is the reason for its failure to feel the migration urge sufficiently to make it leave our shores. For the present it is closely guarded by Mr. W. Pratt and is providing a most interesting and pleasant study.