

PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF BIRDS IN N.Z.—II.

WHITE-FRONTED TERN.

The white-fronted tern (*Sterna striata*), the species illustrated in this issue, is one of the birds selected by the society for ringing. The illustrations show a bird sitting on its nest, and, in a particularly beautiful study, one in flight. Both were taken at Lake Ellesmere, Canterbury, by Mr. K. V. Bigwood, of Christchurch.

More than usual interest attaches to the scheme to band young white-fronted tern, as this bird is found, apparently as a migrant, on the east coast of Australia and Tasmania, principally between May and November. Most of the birds reported from the other side of the Tasman are in immature plumage and the numbers so far recorded indicate that only a small proportion of the N.Z. population crosses the Tasman.

In New Zealand the white-fronted tern is a common species around the coast, breeding at many suitable places in both islands. Small rocks surrounded by water, islands, estuaries or shingle river-beds adjacent to the sea are the most favoured breeding localities. In breeding plumage the black cap is separated from the black bill by a band of white, hence the name "white-fronted," the "fronted" referring to the forehead. This marking is clearly shown in the photographs. The black-fronted tern (*Chlidonias albigularis*) is a smaller bird, with a much greyer plumage, and in the breeding season the black cap extends and embraces the forehead reaching right to the bill, which is orange.—(R.H.D.S.)

BIRDS AT SUMNER—HEATHCOTE ESTUARY, 1948-49.—Two unusual (at least as far as five years' observations are concerned) features during the past year were the wintering of both godwits and pied stilts in the estuary. In 1948 godwits first appeared on October 30 when about 200 birds arrived. Numbers increased until about 400 birds were present on January 29, 1949. This appeared to be the maximum number and on February 20 some birds were seen to have signs of breeding plumage and a week later all godwits seemed to have departed. Three reappeared on March 9, and on April 27 there were six, and on July 28 there were 12, but on July 31 about 200 godwits (in winter plumage) were seen. Twenty-seven pied stilts were seen in the estuary on March 2 and later this number had increased to about 150, and reached a maximum of about 300 on March 30, decreasing to about 200 by May 27. These birds remained in the estuary until mid-July, when they disappeared. Four were seen in Washdyke Lagoon, Timaru, on August 6. Pied oystercatchers in the estuary varied from about 300 in December, 1948, to about 1000 in July, 1949. Only one black oystercatcher has been seen in the flocks this year. Other birds of note have been blue herons (one or two throughout the year), up to four Caspian terns at a time, occasional grey duck, black swans, and the usual gulls and white-fronted terns. Large black and spotted shags are usually about the estuary, and eleven of the latter appeared to be mating on September 18, 1949, when they flew about excitedly and even flew between the trees in my garden—most unusual behaviour for spotted shags.—G. Guy, Christchurch.

SOUTH ISLAND RECORD OF ALLIED SHEARWATER (*Puffinus assimilis elegans*).—An exhausted bird picked up on the bank of the Hokitika River, at Kanieri, on 3/10/49 by Mr. G. Pfahler was sent to the Canterbury Museum where it was preserved in alcohol by Mr. R. R. Forster. As far as can be observed without drying out the specimen, it appears to be a young bird in perfect plumage, showing the facial pattern and dark axillaries of the sub-antarctic race. The extent of pale edging on dorsal feathers is not easily traced on the wet plumage but some is present. This is the first mainland South Island record for any form of *Puffinus assimilis*. The subantarctic form, of which this appears to be a specimen, is known to breed at the Chatham Islands.—R. A. Falla, Wellington.