

## SHORT NOTES

### SOOTY TERN AT CUVIER ISLAND

I was very interested in J. A. F. Jenkins' note on a Sooty Tern (*S. fuscata*) in coastal waters at the end of July, 1961. About the same time when I was on Cuvier Island, a Sooty Tern was seen flying back and forth in Northwest Bay on 24/7/61, for about fifteen minutes during which time it called frequently. It was bigger than a White-fronted Tern (*S. striata*) and its dark colour and long tail-streamers were particularly noted. It was also seen by Ian S. Hogarth.

D. V. MERTON

[The first seven records of Sooty Terns from New Zealand proper were in the period February to April, usually following strong cyclonic storms from the north. It is curious that in 1960 four were found ashore in August; and now there are two occurrences for July, 1961, at a season when New Zealand waters are at their coldest. The nearest breeding grounds to New Zealand are at the Kermadec Islands, where (Oliver 1955, p. 343) 'Wideawakes are first heard at Raoul Island during the latter half of August'; after supposedly being away in the tropics. — Ed.]



### WHITE-WINGED BLACK TERN ON A SUBALPINE TARN

Swan Lagoon, to give it its local name, is a subalpine tarn of some 40 acres in extent, situated at about 2000 ft. a.s.l. on the tussock plain a little to the north of the road which leads to L. Ohau in north-west Otago. As I was passing on 7/1/62 I could not help noticing that this quiet tarn with its shallow edges had attracted a rich and varied population of waterfowl and waders, conspicuous among which was a pair of pure Black Stilts (*H. novaezealandiae*). A little later I was examining a tern which showed a black head and underparts as it squatted on drying mud among a scattered group of Black-fronted Terns (*C. albobristatus*). As soon as I was in a position to see the bird in its true colours with the light behind me it was obvious that it was a White-winged Black Tern (*C. leucopterus*) in almost full breeding dress; but the small bill was not yet red; and a faint trace of white was still visible above and below the bill. In flight the striking pattern of the wings contrasting with the wholly white tail corroborated the identification. In its manner of flight and feeding over the tarn, it resembled the Black-fronted Terns so closely, that against the bright sunshine it was virtually impossible to separate it from them. Two days later when I visited the tarn again, I could not find the White-winged Black Tern; but this was not altogether unexpected, as many Black-fronted Terns drift about the Mackenzie country in summer, following even the smallest streams; and where they go a White-winged Black Tern may also go, for both species when inland are largely insectivorous. The biggest concentration of Black-fronted Terns was over the great morass of the Tasman River delta on L. Pukaki.

To find a White-winged Black Tern on a subalpine tarn in New Zealand is not as surprising as at first it seems. This tern has been widely reported around the coasts of the two main islands and has reached as far south as Invercargill (Heather, *Notornis* IX, 21). In Borneo where it is a regular winter visitor, with a wide range of

habitats it ascends far up rocky rivers and is well known in the farthest interior at 3700 ft. (Harrison, *Notornis VII*, 136).

The plumage changes of the White-winged Black Tern are notoriously puzzling. Adults and sub-adults have been observed near Auckland to change from winter dress to almost complete breeding dress in January and February, the main change taking place within about three weeks. In this plumage they sometimes remain in New Zealand throughout the southern winter and the same birds have been seen still elegantly black and white in late November and early December. In short, White-winged Black Terns in full or almost full nuptial dress may be found in New Zealand in any month of the year.

R. B. SIBSON



#### ORIENTAL CUCKOO AT WHANGAROA, NORTHLAND

For some time in January, 1962, a strange bird, which was finally identified as an Oriental Cuckoo (*Cuculus saturatus*), was reported by my neighbours. Then for three consecutive days in early February it stayed and fed in my garden, where it perched on posts or upright sticks, keeping very still, not even moving its head, then diving down on to the garden with a flop with wings outspread. The food seen to be taken was worms only; and it got one every time.

From my workshop I was able to observe it for many hours at twenty feet, using binoculars, though they were hardly necessary. Size, smaller than Bush Hawk; head round, bill dark, not hooked, with yellow band at base, not long. Eyelid yellow. Top of head sandy-tinger with light slashes, back brown; upper wing surface brown with white bars; upper tail light blue with white bars; tip of tail fringed white. Upper breast white with speckling; breast light with yellow-buff slashes; under tail blue-black with elongated white dots. Legs yellow with white feathers on upper leg. Flight in long shallow dips.

T. M. ROBERTS

[Mr. Roberts' account is accompanied by rough sketches which were made on the spot and leave no doubt about the correctness of the identification. — Ed.]



#### COMMUNAL DISPLAY OF SHINING CUCKOOS

Vegetation at Rissington, Hawke's Bay, consists largely of exotics such as pine trees, gums, wattles and poplars, except for a low growth of mixed native shrubs and trees and exotics in a few deep gullies, and lining the steep banks of the Mangaone Stream. It is surprising to find a few Bell-birds and Tuis inhabiting the area, and odd pairs of Grey Warblers and Fantails nesting in the cypresses (*C. macrocarpa*). An occasional Shining Cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*) is heard. At 8 a.m. on 25/12/61, there occurred one of those communal gatherings which I have observed on previous occasions but in much more suitable surroundings. Six Shining Cuckoos were together in a Black Wattle, making the usual rapid flights from branch to branch, with much excited calling on the note used in such displays. An hour later, the display was being continued in the top of a tall gum, and then the birds were lost sight of. They must have collected together from a very wide area.

A. BLACKBURN