

Kaikohe Sewage Pond

- 26/5/62 First swallows seen this year over sewage pond — 6 birds.
 9/6/62 As many — or more — as seen flocking over pond from May onwards last year, i.e. 20-30; possibly more, but very difficult to count.

Lake Omapere

- 24/3/62 A single swallow seen along southern shore. Other parts of lake not visited.

Ngawha

- 17/2/62 At least 40 swallows, probably 60+, seen over 'Kauri Log' Lake, feeding. (With H.R.McK.)
 31/3/62 Five feeding over small lake in front of Spa Hotel.
 1/7/62 Many seen on 'Kauri Log' Lake, but could not obtain count as they were resting amongst the sticks on the shore.

MALCOLM ROSS

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LITTLE TERNS IN THE FIRTH OF THAMES

In 1957 McKenzie and Sibson (*Notornis* VII, 174-182) collated their observations made over several years on certain puzzling terns which appeared every summer in small non-breeding flocks in the Firth of Thames. As most of these very small terns began to assume breeding dress in late summer at a time when adults of those species of tern which breed in New Zealand show worn feathering and are moulting into winter plumage — noticeable especially by the fading of the black cap — it was tentatively concluded that most of these small terns were *albifrons* and not *nereis*, and that they were coming to New Zealand as migrants from breeding grounds which were probably north of the equator.

In the intervening years small dark-billed, short-tailed terns have continued to appear in summer and to stay for some months on the southern coast of the Firth of Thames. The biggest counts made over the last five summers are: 9 on 30/12/57; 5 on 13/12/58; 8 on 6/12/59; 4 on 27/11/60; 7 on 26/11/61 (v. Annual Locality Reports for Firth of Thames). Elsewhere similar small terns have been widely reported in coastal areas from Rangaunu Bay to L. Ellesmere.



Drawings by C. G. Cathie of heads of Little Tern (*S. albifrons*) and Fairy Tern (*S. nereis*) in breeding dress; based on sketches made in the field and photographs.

On 31/3/62 when we visited the stretch of coast where these terns have most frequently been seen, we found on the tidal flats near Kairito Creek a gray carpet of some 3000 resting Wrybills (*A. frontalis*) among which were some of the rarer arctic waders and also two small terns, perhaps the last of the seven seen earlier in the same summer.

But now they were in freshly moulted breeding dress with glossy black caps and a bright yellow bill with a dark tip. We noted particularly that the recess of white below the crown tapered to a fine point above the eye and was not rounded as in *neréis*, and also that the dark line along the lores reached forward virtually to the bill. The only reasonable conclusion we could draw was that we were examining two adults of *albifrons* in breeding dress and soon about to leave for breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere. We have no doubt that the Little Tern can be safely added to the New Zealand list. In fact the evidence from the Firth of Thames is that it is a regular migrant to New Zealand and that small numbers including first-winter juveniles, arrive about November and that they leave about April, though sometimes yearlings may remain over the winter.

R. B. SIBSON

A. T. EDGAR



LARGE FLOCKS OF TURNSTONES AT PARENGARENGA

On 25/1/62, with Messrs, A. T. Edgar and N. Messenger, I visited Te Pua peninsula, which lies between the well-known wader-grounds of Raumanawa and Kaiata in Parengarenga Harbour. The peninsula is now being broken in for farmland. The scratchy gumland scrub well known to earlier ornithologists who visited the area has gone; and as the result of a second discing, its place had been taken by a sandy-peaty-clayey expanse, bare of vegetation.

Here on the rough broken ground we found near full tide an impressive flock of Turnstones (*A. interpres*) estimated at not less than 1000 and with them were about sixty Golden Plover (*P. dominicus fulvus*). Mixed flocks of these two species have been noted on roughly ploughed land near the sea frequently in Manukau and the Firth of Thames; but never in recent years have the Turnstones been in such numbers. However, Buller in his account of the Turnstones (2nd edition 1888) says that Mr. Cheeseman — the famous botanist — had informed him that in Manukau Harbour in March 1880 he "met with a flock which must have contained upwards of a thousand birds, besides several smaller ones." When in late January, 1961, a study was made of the birds of Farewell Spit, the 800+ Turnstones recorded were not in one single flock, but were scattered over many miles.

P. D. G. SKEGG

(Parengarenga is known to be a 'good Turnstone harbour.' One point worth noting is that this very big flock in the far north at this date cannot be the result of the gathering-up of Turnstones from other parts of New Zealand just prior to migration; but must represent the local summering population temporarily attracted by a new man-made habitat. In January there are sizable flocks of Turnstones, the biggest usually containing 200-300 birds, in a number of favoured haunts south to the Invercargill lagoons. From two well-watched areas, the Karaka shore of Manukau and the Miranda coast of the Firth of Thames, there is some evidence that the number of Turnstones annually reaching New Zealand has been increasing. This may be the result of a succession of favourable breeding seasons on the arctic tundra; and may indicate a recovery towards such numbers as Cheeseman reported in 1880. — Ed.)