

FIELD STUDY WEEK-END, HAWKE'S BAY

19th - 22nd October, 1962

Thirty-one members and friends took part in this most enjoyable and rewarding Field Study Course, most of them for the full three-day period. Some were Hawke's Bay residents, others travelled from Wellington, Taranaki, Taupo, Gisborne, Hamilton, South Auckland, Auckland and the Far North. The weather could not have been better, ample transport was available, arrangements for accommodation and billeting were excellent, and everything was set for a really good week-end.

As in previous Labour Day week-ends the emphasis was on bird study, but this course was perhaps unique in that the greater part of two full days was devoted to studying and counting birds on the shingle beds of two rivers, and that the principal subject for study was the recently established Australian immigrant *Charadrius melanops*, the Black-fronted Dotterel, first reported in New Zealand in 1954 by D. H. Brathwaite (*Notornis* 6, 146) and first recorded as breeding here in the 1961-62 season (*Notornis* 9, 269) by N. B. Mackenzie.

Mr. Mackenzie's home at Pakowhai was the centre of operations. For the duration of the course his packing shed was used as a conference room, and housed a most interesting collection of mounted specimens and skins. On the evening of Friday 19th members assembled for preliminary discussion of the programme of work. As very few of us had until then made the acquaintance of *C. melanops*, Mr. Mackenzie called on his son, Roderick, to describe field characters and behaviour by which the species can be distinguished from Banded Dotterel. Roderick's description was clear, concise, and would have been a credit to an experienced ornithologist five times his age.

On Saturday 20th the group assembled at 9 a.m., and proceeded to Brookfields on the Tutaekuri River where we saw a *melanops* nest and observed the breeding pair for long enough to fix clearly in our minds the diagnostic characters. This done, parties moved off to stations and patrolled their allotted stretches of riverbed, covering the Tutaekuri River as far inland as Ngaroto. In the late afternoon a party visited the estuary; no Red-billed Gulls were seen, but c. 100 Black-backed Gulls, mostly immature, c. 400 White-fronted Terns and c. 60 Black-billed Gulls were noted on the coast. The only Black-billed Gulls seen on the river beds were four birds near a bridge close to the estuary; Black-fronted Terns were absent, although a few birds are sometimes seen on the Tukituki estuary in winter.

Sunday 21st was devoted to a patrol of the Ngaruroro River as far upstream as Whana Whana, and a small party investigated the lower reaches of the Esk River. Limitations of time and available personnel prevented any census work on the Tukituki River, but this has been studied by Mr. Mackenzie and other members and results will be included in a paper on the status of the Black-fronted Dotterel in Hawke's Bay, now in course of preparation.

On Sunday afternoon and on Monday 22nd parties visited the Game Farm and Ahuriri Lagoon. Birds seen at Ahuriri included numerous Mallard and Shoveller, c. 100 Bar-tailed Godwits, c. 200 Pied

Stilts, nine Golden Plover, Bittern, nine White-faced Herons and a White Heron; the two Little Egrets which had been there until the previous week had apparently left, but on Tuesday 23rd four Royal Spoonbills remained of the nine which inhabited the lagoon and river throughout winter and early spring.

Strangers to Hawke's Bay welcomed the opportunity to observe Rooks and Black-backed Magpies, and were delighted by the abundance of Goldfinches. Very few of us had previous experience of patrolling shingle riverbeds and our host had wisely arranged that we should be broken in on the gentler conditions of the Tutaekuri before tackling the more turbulent Ngaruroro. Crossing and re-crossing the swift-flowing streams scouring their way between banks of shingle involved wet pants for all, and involuntary total immersion for two of the party, but fortunately weather conditions ensured rapid drying off between wettings and temporary discomfort was a small price to pay for the pleasure of the outings in such delightful surroundings and with such a profusion of bird life. The total count on Tutaekuri and Ngaruroro was 102 Black-fronted Dotterel, 942 Banded Dotterel and 597 Pied Stilts; unexpected sightings well up the Ngaruroro were three Godwits and three shy Canada Geese. Grey Duck, Mallard and Shoveller had broods of ducklings; of 182 Paradise Duck the greater proportion were in dark plumage, and several broods of young ducklings were noted. Small in numbers were White-faced Herons, Black and White-throated Shags; Black-backed Gulls were sparse on Tutaekuri, but in big colonies (total 2125 birds) on Ngaruroro, where nesting was just starting. Add to all this pairs of Pipits on the shingle beds, introduced and indigenous passerines singing from the river banks, the constant whistling of Shining Cuckoos, and it will be realised how pleasant and varied was a two-day exercise which was also of considerable ornithological value.

Evening meetings on Saturday and Sunday included a programme of talks, wild life films, slides, and a recording of Kokako calls made by M. G. Macdonald, and culminated in a magnificent supper kindly arranged by our host and hostess, to whom we accorded a hearty vote of thanks for a week-end made memorable by their good planning, excellent organisation and warm hospitality.

— A.T.E.



SHORT NOTES

DECLINE OF BANDED DOTTEREL AT TAUPO

In the late 1920's and early 1930's, the Banded Dotterel (*C. binctus*) was quite a common bird in the Taupo district from July to February, frequenting the bare pumice areas. Every year some bred on the waste ground to the east of the now disused Experimental Farm near the A.C. Baths. Here a pair with two very small chicks, only recently out of the nest, was seen on 11/11/29. About this time the farm was taken over as a golf-course of nine holes and the birds returned to breed every year until the area had been grassed sufficiently to allow an extension to eighteen holes. This reduced the area of bare ground to such an extent that it was no longer suitable as a breeding ground and the regular golfers tell me that no Dotterels have been seen there now for more than ten years.