

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.

Another area where breeding occurred was on the large waste pumice flat over which Highway No. 1 now runs between Earthquake Gully and the top of the Hatepe Hill, especially on that part of the flat over which the road to the Hinemaiaia electric power station now passes. In the late 1920's this area was almost bare pumice, having scattered about it a few low plants of Monoao (*Dracophyllum subulatum*) and an occasional clump of tussock grass, all being associated with a covering of moss and lichens — typical 'hare country.' At least two pairs of Dotterels bred here every year. On 17/12/29 six birds were seen together. Breeding pairs were often seen in this area but by 1932 they were becoming fewer with the growth of the scrub which was covering the bare places; and by 1936 Dotterels had apparently deserted the district, none being found in spite of a careful search during the breeding season.

Other areas that the Banded Dotterels used to frequent were the swamps and shingle flats at Waitahanui and the shingle beaches and banks on the western side of Taupo Bay, but I have no evidence that they bred there.

In the spring of 1961, after a gap of several years, I heard from Mr. Nicholls, officer in charge of the recently established Native Plant Nursery that has taken over part of the Spa Farm on the north-eastern bank of the Waikato River, that a pair had nested and reared young on some newly ploughed ground in the plant-nursery, about three-quarters of a mile from the golf-course. On 4/11/61 I saw the hen bird in attendance on three well-feathered chicks. They were just able to fly over a low wire fence from the rough ploughed land into a grassed field where they quickly vanished, while the hen tried to lead us away up the strip of ploughed land.

As the scrub lands are ploughed and brought into cultivation, it is possible that the Banded Dotterel population around Taupo will increase again, though they will be scattered over a far wider area.

— J. S. ARMSTRONG



COOT ON THE VOLCANIC PLATEAU

On 25/9/62 I received a phone call from Mr. W. J. Brown, stating that a strange water-bird was present near his home at Lake Okareka. His description of the stranger left no doubt in my mind about its identity, a Coot of the Australian race (*Fulica atra australis*). On September 27th, C. D. Blomfield and I went to the lake to try to see the bird. To C.D.B. must go the credit of first spotting it, as it dived, splashed and cavorted close inshore. When it swam out into deeper water and in full view at thirty yards, we were able to confirm the identification. Every time it emerged from a dive its bill was full of vegetation, which it promptly swallowed, before diving again. Several times it uttered a guttural squawk, the intonation suggesting annoyance. We believe this is the first record of the Australian Coot for this region.

— M. J. S. BLACK