

FAREWELL SPIT IN SEPTEMBER

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The opportunity of a day's visit to Farewell Spit on 19th September, 1962, gave us the chance to compare the wader populations at that time with those described during the more extensive censuses in January, 1961, and May, 1962 (*Notornis*, Vol. 9, No. 5, and Vol. 10, No. 2). It was most fortunate that the visit co-incided with the arrival of birds from the northern hemisphere and we saw some species still in breeding plumage.

The observations were made while we walked from the base of the spit out to the lighthouse over the peak of the rising tide. This must have reached maximum about 12.30 p.m., while we were about the Six Mile. By the time we had reached the Eleven Mile the tide had fallen sufficiently to enable the birds to return to the inner flats for feeding. Beyond this signs of big flocks having roosted were seen, but they are not included in the numbers given. The figures given in the classified list can be taken as considerably below the actual number present.

LITTLE BLUE PENGUIN — Fresh tracks were seen but no effort was made to estimate numbers.

SHAGS — A few Black Shags were seen and White-fronted Shags were very numerous. No attempt was made to count these.

WHITE-FACED HERON — Very common. No count made.

ROYAL SPOONBILL — Four seen in the exact spot where they were recorded in May, that is Seven Mile.

BLACK SWAN — These were found breeding in small numbers from the Three Mile pond to about the Five Mile. The breeding season appears to be rather drawn out as some swans already had cygnets in their second week, while freshly laid eggs were found in nests. Cygnets 2/6, 1/4, 1/3, 1/2. Nests with eggs, 1/4, 1/2, 1/1. Four empty nests were seen. There were obviously more nests than this about, but time did not permit an extensive search. However, it was considered that the number of nests was low in proportion to the resident population.

GREY DUCK — About 20 seen.

MALLARD — 18.

SHOVELER — 11 feeding on inner saltings.

HARRIER — Not as numerous as might be expected and only about four were seen throughout.

WESTERN WEKA — Numerous, the whole length of the spit.

SOUTH ISLAND PIED OYSTERCATCHER — 750+. This probably represents a high proportion of the population present at this time. These would be immature birds which had not returned to the South Island river-beds for breeding.

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER — About 16. These were scattered among the previous species.

GREY PLOVER — Two single birds were seen at the Seven Mile and Nine Mile respectively. Both were in breeding plumage although one was beginning to fade. Grey Plovers in breeding dress have not been seen before in New Zealand. The birds were extremely

quiet and may have been recovering from their long migratory flight. One called strongly when put to flight; the call is well described in the "Field Guide to Waders," by Condon and McGill.

BANDED DOTTEREL — Only about 50 seen and none appeared to hold territories.

NEW ZEALAND DOTTEREL — One at Six Mile.

WRYBILL — Two amongst small waders at Six Mile.

LONG-BILLED CURLEW — 37. This appears to be the biggest concentration seen in one area in New Zealand. They were seen in three flocks, 15, 21, 1, in the Eight-Ten Mile zone.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT — About 8,000, with the main concentrations in the Eight-Ten Mile zone. Evidence of more birds having roosted further up seems to suggest the main body had already arrived.

GREY-TAILED TATTLER — One seen at Six Mile. It called when flushed and so confirmed identity. It is very likely the bird present during the winter count.

TURNSTONE — Only about 50 seen, many in breeding plumage. It was fairly evident that the full influx of this species had not occurred.

KNOT — 10,000+. As with the Godwit, it appeared as though most of the population of this species had arrived.

CURLEW SANDPIPER — One at Six Mile in full eclipse plumage.

RED-NECKED STINT — Four at Nine Mile associated with Godwit and Knot, all in extremely pale plumage.

PIED STILT — 10, all near the base of the spit and not extending beyond the Six Mile.

GULLS and TERNS — Little effort was made to check populations of these species and the following estimates are given: Black-backed Gull 200+; Red-billed Gull 100+; Caspian Tern 30+.

KINGFISHER — Three near base of spit.

PASSERINES — No record was kept of these.

CONCLUSION

We were most fortunate in striking a favourable tide, both in time and height and this no doubt gave us the successes we achieved. We were also favoured with an exceptionally fine and windless day, a rare phenomenon at the Spit. To visit the Spit at a time when migrants were returning from the north was also very opportune, the most significant observation being the relative absence of Golden Plover and Turnstone, which had apparently not reached the area in any numbers. This would seem to indicate that their migration was a little later than that of the other species and it would be interesting to know if this was general throughout the country.

With present knowledge of Farewell Spit, visitors, by studying data published to date and the tides, can expect to find many interesting waders, even on a short visit. However, to do a comprehensive count or study it will always be necessary to use a large team of workers.