

ANOTHER RECORD OF THE BLACK-TAILED WATERHEN IN NEW ZEALAND

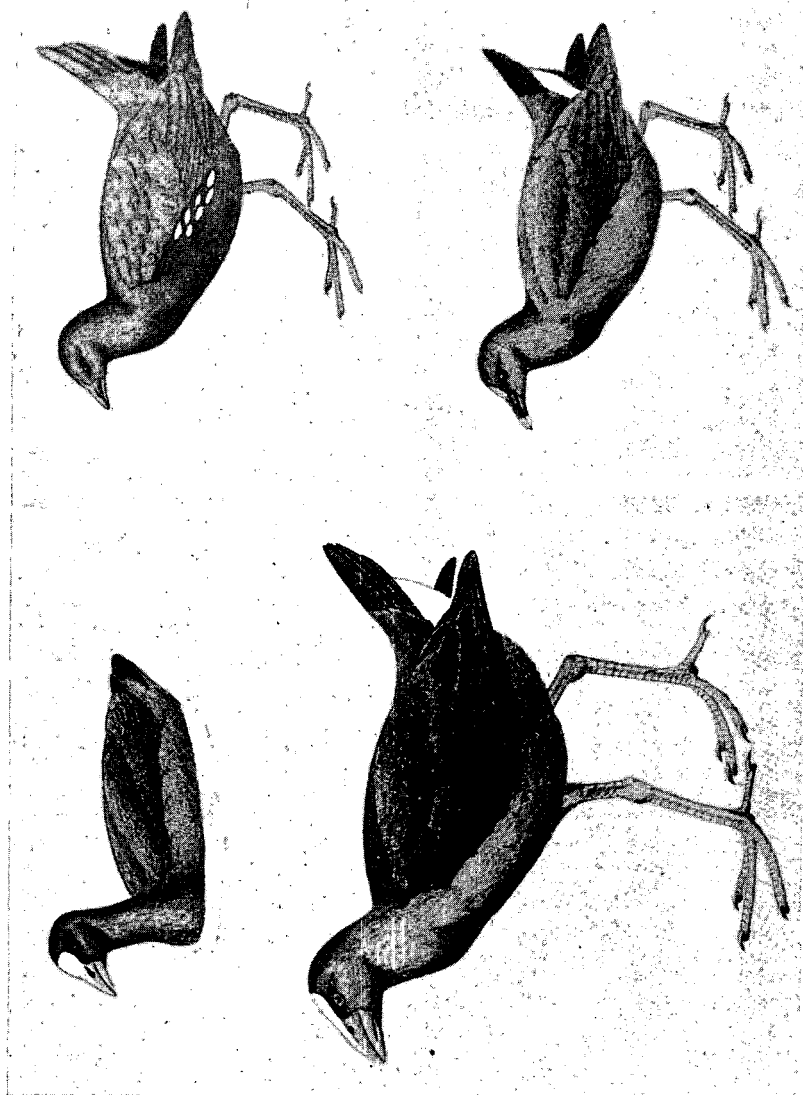
By D. H. BRATHWAITE

Among those Australian bird species which have occurred, or are alleged to have occurred in New Zealand, the records of the Black-tailed Waterhen (*Tribonyx ventralis*) are among the less well documented. Thus, though the following record dates back some six years, details seem worth publishing. The long delay was occasioned, in the first place, by the hope of discovering how long the bird remained in the locality, in the second by the desire to prepare an illustration, and in the third by the mislaying of the relevant field-notes, the most vital of which I have only recently found.

The bird was first seen on the Tukituki riverbed, about 1 mile below Patangata, by Mr. I. Joll, of Havelock North, when he was pheasant-shooting during the first week-end of May, 1957. On Sunday, May 12, with Mr. Joll and Mr. and Mrs. P. M. Roberts, of Hastings, I visited the locality and it was not long before we found the bird. Mr. Joll had thought it to be related to the Pukeko (*Porphyrio porphyrio*). Apart from the Takahē (*Notornis mantelli*) and the Pukeko, the only gallinules likely to occur in New Zealand are the Coot (*Fulica atra*), Dusky Moorhen (*Gallinula tenebrosa*) and the Black-tailed Waterhen (*Tribonyx ventralis*), of which I had seen the latter only once in Australia in 1951, but the first two on several occasions.

The somewhat nervous behaviour and quick movements of this bird prevented me from determining the exact colour of the bill, beyond being satisfied that it was too small and not pale enough to belong to a Coot (apart from the fact that that species seems rarely to be seen on land). Mr. Joll noted the legs as orange-red, and the bill as greenish; according to Mathews & Iredale (*Manual of the Birds of Australia*, 1921, p. 206), the legs of the Black-tailed Waterhen are coral pink and the bill apple-green, the base of the lower mandible orange. The wholly black under tail coverts, and the white spots on the flanks also agreed with the descriptions of the Black-tailed Waterhen. The under-tail coverts in the Moorhen are black in the centre and white at the sides; the colour of legs and bill vary according to age and sex. I was thus left in no doubt as to the identification. On subsequent visits during 1957, I could not find the bird, though tracks in the mud suggested that it was still present. In October, 1958, Mr. Joll informed me that he had seen the bird again in the same place during the preceding winter.

Although the nomadic habits of the Black-tailed Waterhen would perhaps make it a more likely visitor to New Zealand than the apparently more sedentary Moorhen, the latter appeared to me to be sufficiently common in southeastern Australia for a straggler to turn up in New Zealand, and it is with this possibility in mind that I have prepared the accompanying drawings (Plate XX), to uniform scale, of Pukeko, Coot, Black-tailed Waterhen and Dusky Moorhen.



[Drawn to scale by D. H. Brathwaite

XX — Top Left: Coot
Bottom Left: Pukeko

Top Right: Black-tailed Waterhen
Bottom Right: Australian Dusky Moorhen