

such as often attracts waders during the big tides, was being patrolled by Harriers (*C. approximans*). A restless flock of Wrybills (*A. frontalis*) estimated to contain 2000 birds, flew this way and that seeking a suitable place to settle. When we reached the Waitakaruru rivermouth, we found that the only waders to survive the big tide in a secluded bay were six Long-billed Curlews (*N. madagascariensis*).

After the ebb set in as soon as the first wet mud was exposed parties of waders, which had been ranging or resting inland, began to appear and start feeding. As one loose flock of Pied Stilts dropped over the sea-wall, I heard a single call, reminiscent of a Greenshank's 'chew' but much softer, and a smallish brown-gray and white wader, with long legs trailing far beyond the tail, swept past quite low and settled just beyond the salicornia about 100 yards away where some Pied Stilts were already feeding. As it swerved I had noted the white on its back and so confirmed my first impression, based on size and long trailing legs, that it was a Marsh Sandpiper. It was in no desperate hurry to feed, for on alighting among the busily feeding Stilts it tucked its bill under its wing and appeared to doze. There was no difficulty in approaching within about two chains. When it was alerted its bill was seen to be long, fine and straight; and its general slightness beside the Stilts was very evident. Its breast was flecked with spots which appeared as a brown smudge on its otherwise white underparts. Finally, in order to see its diagnostic flight-silhouette, we walked it up again. It flew with the Stilts and quickly settled further out on the mud, for the tide was now dropping fast.

It is almost four years since the first Marsh Sandpiper to be recorded in New Zealand was found in Manukau Harbour (*Notornis* VIII, 125-126). The ecological preferences of the Marsh Sandpiper in New Zealand seem to be very much those of the Pied Stilt.

R. B. SIBSON



THREE REPORTS OF TATTLERS

(A) PORT JACKSON

During a camping holiday at Port Jackson, on the tip of Coromandel Peninsula, my son, Christopher, and I became familiar with a solitary snipe-like wader which we saw almost daily along the beach between 21/12/62 and 1/1/63. The following description is from notes made while actually watching the bird: Upperparts uniformly dark grey; underparts light-grey; white stripe above eye; legs yellow, beak black, long and slender, about equal in length to tarsus. It would fly gracefully low over the water and we could not help noticing its call, a pleasant two-note bubbling flute-like whistling (a minor third, I think) reminiscent of the sound made by a childhood toy known as a Swanee whistle — one filled with water. The call was repeated in quick succession five or six times at a stretch during the low flight. On my return home after consulting friends and books, I realised that the wader which my son and I had had the opportunity of observing so often was a Tattler.

SYLVIA REED

[To distinguish between the two forms of Tattler in winter plumage is very difficult. On the evidence of Mrs. Reed's detailed description of the call, this tattler was of the Alaskan form (*incanus*) rather than of the Siberian (*brevipes*). — Ed.]

(B) — NAPIER

During a visit to the Ahuriri Lagoon on the morning of 13/1/63 I was observing a flock of Bar-tailed Godwits (*L. lapponica*) feeding on the tidal mudflats to the seaward side of the railway embankment. My attention was attracted to a bird which appeared noticeably smaller. The light was poor with a glare coming over the water as the sun rose. In the few moments available before the flock flew I could only see that this bird had yellow legs, grey breast and a white under-belly.

On 15th January I returned, this time with a key to the other characters of birds with yellow legs. The bird was seen again briefly and indistinctly, but it was not until 20th January that I succeeded in getting a really good look and description as follows:

Size, 2/3 of Godwit. Bill, straight black with horn colour at base. Breast, grey, changing abruptly to white on the belly. Legs yellow. Throat, white, extending to side of head. Back, mantle and crown, ashy grey. Eye-stripe and eye, black. Primaries appeared slightly darker on edges.

This description tended to convince me that it was a tattler and this was confirmed by watching its feeding habits.

In company with Godwits it was searching in shallow water for small crabs. These it held by the leg and shook until the body dropped into the water. The leg was then swallowed and the body retrieved, the process being repeated until the body was finally swallowed. When feeding it would sometimes run rapidly along the water's edge and, when searching, it moved its head continually.

The tattler was shown to R. B. Sibson on 23rd January. It was not possible on any occasion to determine the length of the nasal groove. It was rather a silent bird. But once or twice when it rose it uttered a single call, like that of a Pacific Golden Plover, but much softer; on the strength of which it was judged to belong to the Asiatic form *brevipes*.

This tattler has not been seen at Ahuriri since early February. Although its general characteristics and feeding habits agree so well with the bird seen at Waikanae by I. G. Andrew (*Notornis* X, 67-72) it showed no sign of wanting to perch on any of the logs or sticks that were available. During the three weeks it stayed here it could nearly always be found within 300 yards of the first sighting. When not resting it moved actively near the water's edge and remained in a rather loose association with small flocks of Bar-tailed Godwits. If these were not in the area it appeared to be quite content to feed and rest in solitude.

It should perhaps be mentioned that on 10/11/62 as reported in *Notornis* X, 188, a Wandering Tattler (*H. i. incanus*) was identified at Cape Kidnappers, only some 15 miles away, by the R.A.O.U. members on their New Zealand tour.

NORMAN MACKENZIE

(C) — LAKE TUAKITOTO, NEAR KAITANGATA

On 2/2/63 H.R.McK. was studying what appeared to be a Red-capped Dotterel (*C. ruficapillus*) when a tattler (*Heteroscelus* sp.) flew in and stood in the shallow water of the muddy lake-shore. Before it flew away across the lake there was time to note its general colour

and the shape and length of its bill. The groove on the upper mandible was not seen, the light being the wrong way. It did not call when it flew.

D.V.M., on 10/2/63, saw and heard at the same place what was most likely the same bird. The call was a short burst of even whistled notes; but not enough to indicate whether it was *incanus* or *brevipes*, though the choice of habitat seems to favour *brevipes*. This is the fifth locality in the South Island to produce a tattler in recent years and the most southerly. It is also the only record of a tattler inland and away from tideline or saltmarsh.

H. R. McKENZIE

D. V. MERTON

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ANOTHER KAIPARA RECORD OF THE LESSER FRIGATE-BIRD

While fishing on 23/3/63, three miles below Moturemo Island on the edge of the Tauhoa Channel, I saw two birds in combat, coming from a southerly direction. As they passed about a chain away at a height of only fifty feet, I saw that one was a Caspian Tern and the attacker a male Lesser Frigate-Bird (*Fregata ariel*). The tern appeared exhausted and screamed every few seconds. The slightly larger frigate-bird showed flashing white patches under each wing-root and the long forked tail was clearly visible.

The flight continued north with slight zig-zags and undulations for the next half-minute, during which both birds gained considerable height. While still in view they suddenly disengaged, the black frigate-bird making no attempt to gather any disgorged fish, but continuing on course. The Caspian Tern immediately turned west, spread its wings and glided for the South Head. Not once did the frigate-bird miss a wing beat in its heavy labouring flight. It is, indeed, a puzzle to me how a Lesser Frigate-bird can stay air-borne for long on its long thin wings, which resemble razor-straps. It is now just over three years since I saw a Lesser Frigate-Bird's attack on a Gannet (*S. serrator*) in much the same area (*Notornis* IX, 109).

F. P. HUDSON

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BROWN BOOBY AND GREY NODDY IN NORTHLAND WATERS

On the northern coast of the Takatu Peninsula and seaward of Maungatawhiri Beach, Pied and Little Shags roost in a group of pohutukawas which fringe the top of a cliff. Below the roost on a shelf twenty feet above the high-tide mark, a juvenile Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*) may have roosted for some time with the shags. The first notice I had of the bird was on 27/12/62 when there was a sudden, heavy flapping directly above my head. The Booby lost height until it caught the wind. It flew out to sea, but soon returned. When it saw me, it veered away once more. From such close range, with 12 x 50 binoculars, such salient features as the chocolate-brown coloration, the lighter underparts, the long V-shaped white on the underwing and the pale face could not be missed. As it took off, the splayed orange feet and the white on the underwing were particularly striking. A Gannet (*S. serrator*) flying past enabled comparisons to be made. The Booby was slightly smaller and lighter in build. Whereas the Gannet soared