

In November 1961, E.W.D. and D.H.B. began a study of a colony of Black-billed Gulls (*L. bulleri*) on the Ashley River, Canterbury, a week or so prior to what proved to be the start of hatching. A variation in pigmentation similar to that noted in *L. dominicanus* was found to occur, and the eggs were then marked (with "Maruzen" ink) X, Y, and Z in what was judged to be the order of laying. This was on November 19, and the colony was visited frequently in evenings and week-ends up to December 3, and again on December 9, covering most of the hatching period. This proved to be a fairly difficult test of the theory, as there were only eight 3-egg clutches and 44 of 2 eggs only. Of these we were able to determine the hatching order of six of the former and 26 of the latter. In the 6 3-egg clutches, the hatching sequence proved to be XYZ in three cases, XZY in two cases and YZX in one case. In the 26 2-egg clutches, the hatching sequence was XY in 24 and YX in the other two.

Until it can be proved that the eggs in a clutch of Black-billed Gulls hatch invariably in the sequence in which they are laid, this test cannot be regarded as conclusive, but we suggest that it justifies further investigation by anyone with suitable opportunities to work with large colonies of gulls or terns.

REFERENCE CITED

Preston, F. W., 1957: Pigmentation of Eggs: Variation in the Clutch Sequence. *Auk*, 74 (1): 28-41, 4 text-figs., 6 tables, plates 2-4.

— E. W. DAWSON & D. H. BRATHWAITE



BLACK-FRONTED DOTTEREL NEAR OAMARU

On 9/10/63, laden with photographic gear, I was crossing the Kakanui River near its junction with the Kauru, a few miles from Oamaru, when I noticed a small dotterel which looked unfamiliar; but I gave it only fleeting attention. When I returned about 4 p.m. and was recrossing the river, I flushed the bird again. It had a distinctive flight and markings, quite different from those of a Banded Dotterel (*C. bicinctus*). I spent the next two hours watching it and trying to secure satisfactory photographs. Some of these I was later able to submit to Dr. R. A. Falla, who was able to identify the bird at once as a Black-fronted Dotterel (*C. melanops*).

— IAN L. MCVINNIE



NORTH ISLAND FIELD STUDY WEEK-END ROTORUA, 25th - 28th OCTOBER, 1963

When the visitors arrived they learned with regret that the R.O. for Volcanic Plateau, Mr. C. D. Blomfield, had been ill for some time and had gone to hospital. However, Raymond Jackson had been appointed Acting R.O. and he and a band of local stalwarts had performed a prodigious amount of work and organisation and the situation had been well and truly saved. The use of the Tourist Dept's. Social Club Hall had been given free of charge and it was the rendezvous for meetings and the assembly point for outings. On the Friday evening when most members had arrived F. E. Gee welcomed the visitors and outlined the programme. Before midnight all of the thirty-three visitors

had assembled. They came from Wellington, Wanganui, Taranaki, Wairarapa, Hawkes Bay, Gisborne, Bay of Plenty, Waikato, South Auckland, North Auckland and Far North. Local members from Volcanic Plateau included two from Taupo. Thirty-eight members took the field each day.

On the morning of October 26th, with special permission, the party, guided by Raymond Jackson (of the Forest Research Institute) toured the Whakarewarewa exotic forest, the main object being to see to what extent native and introduced birds had adapted themselves to this environment. Stops were made in stands of timber of different kinds — larch-redwood; eucalyptus - pinus patula - pinus radiata (small and large mixed); pure redwood; and larch with coprosma and other native shrubby trees. Of the native birds the Whitehead led in numbers by far, being present at all stops. Others more or less in order of numbers were: Grey warbler, Silver-eye, Fantail, Kingfisher, Bellbird, Tui, Shining Cuckoo, and one pair only of Pied Tit. The Pied Tits had a nest on a ledge of a roadside cutting. The three large chicks were easily seen with the aid of a mirror and the party nearly wrecked the programme by staying a long time watching the parents feed their young. Of the imported birds the Chaffinch led easily. Sparrows, Hedgesparrows, Goldfinches, Blackbirds, Songthrushes and one Redpoll made up the rest.

In the afternoon the mixed colony of Red-billed and Black-billed Gulls at Sulphur Point was studied. Further along were 12 Grey Teal, several Scaup, Grey Shoveler and Mallard ducks, some Dabchicks, a few Black Shags, White-throated and Little Pied, and more than 150 Little Black Shags. Black-backed and Black-billed Gulls, Shags, Dabchicks, Black Swans and Scaup were seen on all lakes visited.

That evening J. L. Kendrick gave his unique tape recordings from Hen Island, off Whangarei, of the many calls of the N.I. Saddle-back and showed motion pictures of this rare bird feeding and displaying. This was a revelation to all, as was also the recording of the calls and wing noise of many thousands of Fluttering Shearwaters, Allied Shearwaters and Grey-faced Petrels, taken as they came to their burrows after dark or left them before dawn. Of individual birds, he showed flashlight photographs. The weird howls and moans of the Little Blue Penguin at night were better known to some. All of this was accompanied by instructive and engaging comment. Pictures of the work of the party were shown and comments given on their scientific pursuits.

The next day was spent at Lake Okareka, where the party had the valued privilege of the use of W. J. Broun's house as H.Q. Only a few yards away on the lake a pair of Australian Coots fed their brood of seven small young. These little ones were really outstanding with their richly russet heads, necks and upper bodies, with a golden "mane" from crown down to back of neck. Some members, using a boat, visited a Black Swan's nest and put up a Bittern. One White-faced Heron was seen and one Caspian Tern, both of these now being not unusual on inland lakes. On this lake there was a high proportion of "smudgy" small shags, coloured partly as White-throated and partly as Little Pied. In the north-east corner some Grey Teal and Shoveler were closely seen and in wet fields Pied Stilts were breeding, one nest of four eggs being found. A Fernbird was heard nearby.

In the evening Raymond Jackson gave a most interesting and informative talk, using slides and blackboard, on bird life in the main

Kaingaroa Forest, from the "cut-over" scrub stage to mature pines, describing the effects on the bird life as growth proceeded. He then showed a fine series of slides of birds and their habitat on the islands of Handa and Isle of May in Scotland. J. L. Kendrick showed "movies" of cave work which has produced many ancient remains of birds. He also showed a tramping trip over the Ruahine Range, where he hopes to find rare birds. Most of the viewers were content to admire this rather than to volunteer for the next trip.

The Secretary of the Society, Mr. A. T. Edgar, took advantage of this occasion to express on behalf of the visitors heartfelt thanks for all that had been done to make the project a success and to ensure the happiness and enjoyment of the participants. He appealed for help in the form of filling in schedules which give the range and distribution of birds for the compiling of the next edition of the Checklist and for work on the Nest Recording Scheme, for which large numbers of cards are needed to provide breeding patterns.

On Monday, 28th, some who had to leave early went to Hamurana, on the north side of Lake Rotorua, to see more of the lake birds and to photograph them. The main portion of the party went to Hongi's Track, between Lakes Rotoiti and Rotoehu, to carry out a bush bird census on the lines evolved and used by E. G. Turbott and P. C. Bull on Hen Island, Three Kings Islands and the Fiordland "Lake Monk Expedition."

Each party is armed with a chart, ruled in squares, with the names of the birds down the left-hand side, names of party, date and locality marked along the top and on the next line the numbers for the stops. At least eight stops are advisable. Each party moves into the bush on its allotted route. The first stop is made when well clear of the starting point. The party sits down in silence and waits for say five minutes to let bird movement become normal. In the next ten minutes or so all sightings or callings are noted and No. 1 column filled in before moving on. The distance to No. 2 stop is governed by the type of bush and terrain and must be far enough to be clear of calls heard at No. 1 stop. Individual loud singers, such as Tui or Thrush, can be ignored, if already recorded. Birds seen between stops, but not at either stop, are added to the next stop. Lures may not be used. Silence is essential, as is also a good knowledge of calls of all birds in the area. The numbers on the whole of the charts are then totalled and percentages worked out for each species.

Six parties set out and a large part of the Hongi's Track area of bush was well covered. Adding all the cards together the results in Checklist order were: Total 411. Harrier Hawk 2; N.Z. Pigeon 8; Shining Cuckoo 15; Longtailed Cuckoo 1; Morepork 1; Kingfisher 17; N.I. Rifleman 1 (plus ?1); Fantail 74; Pied Tit 5; Fernbird 2; Whitehead 8; Grey Warbler 66; Blackbird (some not in bush?) 27; Bellbird 25; Tui 82; Silvereye 54; Chaffinch 23; Parakeet sp., heard, ?1 in area, 2 outside area, not included.

Birds in clearings not included above: Pheasant 9, Californian Quail (some perhaps in bush?) 10; Skylark 5; Songthrush (some perhaps in bush?) 9; Goldfinch 1; Redpoll 2; Myna 14.

This exercise concluded the activities of the Week-end and the travellers set off for home well pleased with all they had seen and done, and grateful indeed to their Rotorua hosts.

— H.R.McK.